



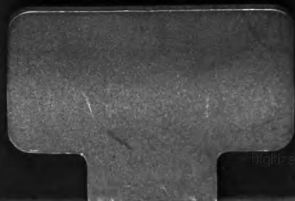
·BY·ORDER·OF·QUEEN·MAUDE·

·A·STORY·OF·HOME·LIFE·

—:— BY —:—

—≡·LOUISA·CROW·≡—





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BY ORDER OF QUEEN MAUDE:

A STORY OF HOME LIFE.

BY

LOUISA CROW,

Author of "Mollie's Maidens;" "For Conscience' Sake;" &c.

ILLUSTRATED.



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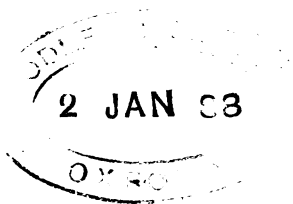
BLACKIE & SON, 49 & 50 OLD BAILEY, E.C.

GLASGOW, EDINBURGH, AND DUBLIN.

1888.

2537.

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BY ORDER OF QUEEN MAUDE.

CHAPTER I.

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER.

MISS PERSIS ELLERSLIE was leaning back in her easy-chair dreaming and planning; not for her own pleasure or comfort, however, for she was one of those good unselfish women who resolutely put all their trials and troubles, their sicknesses and their sorrows, in the background, and bestow their pity as well as their help on others.

Her thoughts just at present were centred on her young cousin and adopted daughter, on whose account she was meditating a removal from Seabay, the pretty sheltered spot on the south coast of England where by the advice of her physician—for she was an invalid—the winter had been spent. But the spring had come, and some girl friends who had been staying there on account of a consumptive brother, had gone back to their native Edinburgh; leaving such a void behind them that Miss Ellerslie, ever indulgent and con-

siderate, was asking herself whether they two should not go to Scotland also.

Maude Coryton, a slim, brown-eyed, brown-haired maiden of seventeen, endowed with good abilities and overflowing with energy, had talked regretfully of the opportunities Helen and Agnes Maxwell enjoyed at Edinburgh—the lectures they attended, the exhibitions they visited, the classes they joined; and if Miss Ellerslie listened in silence, she had not been unmindful of what she considered a very natural longing on the part of the young girl for a livelier, busier mode of life than could be enjoyed in the quiet sea-coast town given over for many months in the year to invalids and their attendants.

It would require an effort to transport herself and her belongings to bonnie Scotland; a great effort on the part of one who knew that every passing month left her weaker and more incapable of much exertion; but we have already said that Persis Ellerslie did not live for herself. The journey once made she would be repaid for the fatigue by Maude's delight at the change, and when the spring term was over, and the heat of summer drove both professors and pupils from the city, it might be possible to find some pleasant retreat among some of the lakes.

But here the dreamer's reverie came to an end, for Maude, with her pretty face slightly flushed, and her lips set in the resolute curves that denoted some newly-formed determination, was leaning over her.

"My mind is quite made up," was announced with startling gravity; "I have written to papa

to tell him he may expect me to-morrow. It has cost me a tremendous struggle, for I have been very happy with you, dear auntie; but it is my duty to go home, and I will not shrink from it."

The fragile little lady to whom this speech was made became a trifle paler than before. She was but ill-prepared for the shock of such an announcement, made too without any conception on the part of Maude that hers would not be the only struggle involved in this separation. With a thoughtlessness common to the young she forgot how for nearly five years she had been the chief object of Miss Ellerslie's care, and treated by her with almost motherly tenderness.

There was no one, however, to remind her of this, Miss Ellerslie contenting herself with saying gently:

"Aren't you acting rather hastily, my dear? In the letter you read me from your father there was nothing said about your going home, was there?"

"Not in actual words, but I did not need telling what I ought to do," Maude responded, with her head thrown back and her hands folded on her bosom. She looked like a heroine; she felt like one, for she was well aware that in giving up the position she now held she was renouncing much that she valued and enjoyed.

But Miss Ellerslie was making her one feeble protest against the step.

"I wish you had spoken to me sooner. I should have urged you to wait till you could communicate with your father and ascertain his wishes."

"Why should I wait," asked Maude, "now I have satisfied myself that I ought to go to him? He must have some one to keep his house and take care of all those children. I cannot understand how his sister could leave him, and so suddenly too."

But here she was interrupted.

"I do not like to hear you speak of your Aunt Emma in such accusing tones. Again and again she had delayed her marriage for the sake of her brother and his motherless little ones; and she should not be blamed that when Mr. Heath's health failed, and he was advised to go to New Zealand, she consented to be married at once, that she might accompany him."

"If you take that view of the case, I suppose it was very good of Aunt Em," Maude admitted, "especially as Mr. Heath is such a very commonplace-looking little man. But the fact remains that she has left England, and as papa's eldest daughter I ought to take her place. He cannot be left with no one to attend to his comforts, and keep those rebellious boys in order."

"You forget that there is your sister Nesta."

"But Nesta herself is a mere child! Ah yes, I know that she is barely fifteen months younger than I am; but then she is timid and slow, and has no energy whatever. A most affectionate little creature—I love her dearly—but quite unequal to the responsibilities you propose to thrust upon her. I hope to be of great use to Nesta."

Miss Ellerslie leaned back in her chair with a resigned air. It was a waste of words to offer

objections to the plans with which Maude herself was so well satisfied; so she only hazarded one more remark:

"You will lose your chance of winning the gold medal at the art classes."

"Yes, it will be a great disappointment; I had worked so hard for it; but—" here Maude paused and reddened, till her natural truthfulness incited her to finish the sentence—"but it is whispered amongst the students that two of the competitors stand higher than I do. Their work is neither so crude nor so conventional. If I am to fail I shall not be sorry to be out of reach of would-be consolers."

"I still think you should have waited till you could hear from your father," was Miss Ellerslie's next observation.

"Why?" queried Maude abruptly; and having no answer ready, her aunt made none, but sat watching the active movements with which the young girl went to and fro, collecting various trifles she called her own, in preparation for the "packing up," which was to commence forthwith.

"I shall miss you dreadfully," Miss Ellerslie faltered by and by; but Maude, who was quitting the room loaded with books, statuettes, photos, &c., did not hear it; nor, if she had, would she have comprehended what a void her departure would create in the life of this lonely and suffering woman.

When Mrs. Coryton and three or four of her children were stricken with fever, and considerable relatives proposed to withdraw those members

of the family who had escaped the infection, the half-distracted husband and father had thankfully let them go; but when the mother was no more, and the little girls convalescent, he would have gathered all the absent ones about him again, if Miss Ellerslie had not begged so earnestly to be allowed to retain Maude that it would have seemed ungrateful to refuse.

And now Maude was returning home by her own choice, eager to take upon herself the post of housekeeper to her father and governess to her younger sisters—so eager, so intent on proving herself efficient on all points, that she had not a thought to spare for aught else. For the remainder of that day and part of the next Maude Coryton might be seen making calculations with knitted brows; or rushing out to effect the purchase of weighty volumes to be carefully stowed at the bottom of her trunk; or putting her head in at Miss Ellerslie's door to inquire the prices and titles of the most reliable works on domestic economy; or, with hands almost too sore from tugging at cords and straps to hold a pen, opening her aunt's desk to write notes of adieu to a few acquaintances, and regrets to the superintendent of the Sunday-school, in which she was an energetic teacher, that she should have been called away by home duties and compelled to relinquish her class.

Not till the cab chartered to convey her to the railway-station was being laden with her luggage, and Maude with her arms around Miss Ellerslie's neck was saying farewell, did a latent feeling of remorse incite her to murmur:

"You have been very good to me, dear auntie. I hope it does not grieve you to lose me? You quite understand, don't you, that it is for papa's sake I am going?"

A kiss and a fervent prayer that God's blessing would rest on her adopted child was the only reply; but it sent Maude away partially reassured; and in the bustle of superintending the removal of her many boxes and packages to the guard's van, and some little anxious watching lest she should miss the worthy couple under whose escort Miss Ellerslie had arranged that she should travel, the few—very few—and faint misgivings that had made themselves felt were soon forgotten.

CHAPTER II.

EXPECTING A GUEST.

WHILE Maude was being transported by the power of steam from the south of Devon to the metropolis the tidings of her approach preceded her, and filled her sister Nesta with surprise and delight.

The postman was late that morning; so late that Mr. Coryton's overcoat was having its final brush, and his hat was in his hand, when the well-known rat-tat was heard at the door. As usual, it was the signal for a gleeful scamper along the hall, and a tussle between Prim the terrier and his little master "Boy" to secure

any letter that chanced to slip over and out of the letter-box.

Three or four of these epistles Mr. Coryton tore open, glanced at, and crumpled into balls for Prim to play with; three or four more were put into his pocket to be read on his way to the British Museum, where he had long held a post of some importance, and Maude's note would have gone with them if he had not noticed the postmark.

Nesta, who in breathless haste was sewing a loose button on one of papa's gloves, and pricking her fingers cruelly the while, saw him raise his bushy gray eyebrows as he mastered the gist of his daughter's rather lengthy epistle, and then thrust it into her sister's hands. There was no time for commenting upon it, for his train was nearly due. With a hasty "Maude is coming to us. You must do the best you can," away he went, and Nesta had to curb her curiosity till Walter, and Cleve, and "Boy" had gone their several ways also.

The house was always in commotion from a quarter to nine till the hour had struck and the gate clanged behind the last of the trio. If there were not a missing book or paper to be searched for till its owner discovered it in his own pocket, there was sure to be a hue and cry for a certain dingy brown cap Walter persisted in wearing, and which was generally routed out of some most unaccountable place, as under sofa cushions, in Nesta's work-basket, or not infrequently in Prim's kennel.

As soon as the search proved successful off

would go Walter, a strong lad of fourteen, to the college, where his love of fun made him as great a favourite with his class-mates as he was with the masters for his abilities when he could be induced to use them.

While everyone's attention was given to Walter, Cleve would often slip away to the grammar-school he attended, learning his lessons as he went. A shy, silent boy was Cleve Coryton, frequently to be seen with his collar buttoned awry or a boot-lace broken, in spite of Nesta's anxious supervision. A *peculiar* boy his teachers called him, but giving promise of doing good work by and by.

The last to start was always Alfie, the youngest, the mischievous frolicsome imp who, for his own safety's sake, had to be convoyed to and from the Misses Buxton's preparatory establishment for little boys by the lad who cleaned the knives; and as he was wont to seize any opportunity of escaping into the garden, of which the soil was clayey, he was often brought back a thing of mud, not of beauty. Starting Boy off to school was a tax upon the forbearance of everyone concerned in it.

Not till he was seen trotting away contentedly by the side of his guardian, and the hubbub of voices had subsided, did Nesta find a quiet moment for reading the letter her father had given her. She could scarcely believe that such good news could be true. Maude coming home to be her friend, her helper, her companion—oh, it was so delightful that she flew into the breakfast parlour, where the little girls, Una and Zoe, were neatly piling

plates, and cups, and saucers on the tray ready for Margaret to carry down-stairs, and told the glad tidings to them!

Not that they could enter into her feelings on the subject, they were too young; neither could they comprehend the enthusiastic affection with which she regarded the elder sister, but too rarely seen during the period of her residence with Miss Ellerslie.

Pale, diminutive Nesta, who had never grown much nor recovered her rosy bloom since the attack of fever from which she arose motherless, had a very warm heart and a great deal of romance concealed under her quiet sober manner. Even her father was not aware that she looked upon Maude as her exemplar of all that was good, and clever, and lovely.

Amongst her few acquaintances, who, she would ask herself, had ever carried off as many prizes and certificates as Miss Ellerslie's accounts of her protégée's doings proudly reported? Who amongst them could have painted—in oils too—such a charming landscape as his eldest daughter had sent papa on his last birthday? Or which of them was as fair, as stately, as intellectual looking, and refined as the original of the photograph her adoring sister treasured? Where, in fact, was there such another queen amongst maidens as Maude?

Nesta's raptures were suddenly checked by the recollection that if her sister would arrive in a few hours it would be necessary to make a few preparations for her reception.

It was rather unfortunate that she had not given longer notice of her intentions, especially

as Margaret's monthly or great wash was in process, and that faithful old servant was apt to be snappish, and consider herself ill-used, if hindered.

Very little assistance therefore could be demanded from her, and yet Nesta was bent on having everything cosy and nice for such a welcome visitor.

She was somewhat hampered by want of space. When Mr. Coryton married and commenced house-keeping in the cheerfully situated semi-detached villa at Crouchend, it was easy to spare a guest-chamber or even two on an emergency, but as his family increased and grew up this became an impossibility.

Sometimes he had talked of removing into a larger dwelling, but this, his first home, had so many sweet and sad reminiscences attached to it that he could never make up his mind to leave it.

So an extra chamber was thrown out over the kitchen for the boys, and for some time previous to her marriage Miss Coryton—the Aunt Emma who had hastened to her brother's assistance when he lost his wife—found it expedient to take possession of the spare room, resigning it on her departure to Nesta, Alfie sleeping in a small dressing-closet that opened out of it.

Nesta had been wont to congratulate herself on her large, light, pleasant, sleeping apartment; but this morning, after learning that Maude would soon be here to share it, she gazed around her with more critical eyes. The curtains were faded, the walls were bare, and no amount of rubbing and dusting would hide the wear and tear the furniture had suffered since Mr. Coryton's wedding-

day, eighteen years ago. It was impossible to renew the dull colours of the carpet, or make the old-fashioned *meubles* look new, but fresh muslin draperies at the windows and about the toilet-glass made such an improvement that the young housekeeper's troubled brows relaxed.

Not that her efforts stopped here. All day long, followed by twin satellites, did she toil up and down stairs seeking pretty things wherewith to embellish Maude's chamber. The flower-stands were ruthlessly despoiled of their best cinerarias, and a pot of mignonette for the ledge of Maude's window; every other mantel-piece was robbed of its prettiest ornaments to adorn Maude's. The choicest brackets in the drawing-room were transported to the floor above, and all the best of the groups of flowers Aunt Emma had painted in water-colours, and framed in leather, were unhesitatingly taken down from their original places to beautify the bare walls of Maude's chamber.

And thus Nesta went on hour after hour devising additions and improvements; pinning and unpinning the festoons of muslin arranged to hide the defects in the glass, or the stains time had imprinted on the once gaily-tinted wall-paper; climbing on unsteady heights of chairs with ottomans upon them to paste up a crack here, or put in a nail there; darning thin places in the toilet-cover, and eking out with ivy the few snowdrops plucked from the only cluster in the garden to fill a Parian vase for Maude's table.

By the time her labours drew to a close she was dusty, dishevelled, and very tired; all the

more so because she had been too much absorbed in her work to eat her dinner.

She was taking a final survey of the room, and listening with a gratified smile to Zoe and Una's approving exclamations, when a cab heavily weighted with luggage rumbled up to the door, and a lovely face peered out of the window. The next minute Maude had alighted, and, with a graceful movement of her hand, was shaking out the long folds of her skirts; while Nesta, her own dusty gown and disordered tresses forgotten, was flying down-stairs into the hall to be the first to embrace and greet her.

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVED.

THE fond sisterly hug was responded to with equal affection; but none the less did Maude rapidly disengage herself from those clinging arms, and turn her attention to the cabman. She had often travelled with Miss Ellerslie, and prided herself on the ladylike firmness with which she could calculate the correct fares, repel extortion, and command the services of guards and porters.

Not till all her luggage had been carried into the house, counted, and the man paid and dismissed, did she feel herself free to kiss Nesta again, and speak to the little girls who were

shyly regarding her from a distance. The wanderings in search of health that had long kept Miss Ellerslie abroad, and compelled her when in England to reside on the south coast, rendered Maude almost a stranger to her younger sisters, more interesting because she was very pretty and dressed tastefully, than because she was so near a relative.

Neither was Maude herself endued with sufficient partiality for children to feel drawn towards the timid little creatures eying her so curiously. She held out her hand, certainly, to both in turn, expressing a hope that they were good, and then bidding them run away, as she had a great deal to say to Nesta.

"How they have grown!" she observed as they willingly obeyed her. "Is it my fancy that Zoe pokes, and one of her shoulders is rather higher than the other? I must be careful to have it attended to."

"As for you, little Nesta"—she paused to make a critical survey of her sister, which the latter found most embarrassing. It rendered her so painfully conscious of a hole in her slipper, and the rent her apron had received while dragging a small writing-table—her own peculiar property—from the corner where it usually stood to a cosy nook in the chamber above. A slatternly girl might have been careless of the impression her appearance was evidently creating, or a less sensitive one would have given Maude to understand that it was in her service she had become so dusty and dishevelled; as it was, Nesta said nothing, even when gloved fingers smoothed her

roughened hair, and she was addressed in pitying accents.

"Poor dear, I am so thankful that I made up my mind and came to you! I can see that you have been wanting me badly."

It was a relief that Margaret entered the room just then to give her greeting to the new-comer. This quick-tempered, warm-hearted woman had left school to live with Mrs. Coryton on her marriage, and had never held any other situation. One after another of the babies as they arrived had been tended by her with untiring devotion. It was she who closed the eyes of her beloved mistress, who, humanly speaking, saved the life of the tiny infant not expected to survive her, and had toiled for her nurslings ever since with a zeal that nought but their grateful love could requite.

Mr. Coryton and his sister had never been unmindful of her services, and regarded Margaret as a faithful humble friend as well as domestic, respecting her all the more because she never presumed on her position.

But Maude, during her residence with Miss Ellerslie at German baths and sea-side hotels, had learned to look upon servants as a class that must be kept at a distance, and her manner to her old nurse was more patronizing than affectionate. The good woman brought into the room with her a whiff of soap-suds, at which our fastidious young lady turned up her nose.

"I hope the washing is not done at home?" she exclaimed.

"I should be ashamed of myself if it were not,"

retorted Margaret with widely-opened eyes; "and why shouldn't it be while I'm willing to do it, leastways, with the help of the widow who comes in o' Saturdays for the scrubbing?"

"Of course you have a washing-machine and all the newest appliances for economizing time and labour? No! Then I must contrive to get them for you."

Margaret smiled, and held up a pair of strong capable hands.

"Thank ye all the same, missie, but these are the only 'chinery I ever had or ever wanted, so don't waste your money on me. If you've a few pounds to spare, spend it on a new arm-chair for the master; I doubt whether the one he has will hold together much longer."

"Old servants are a mistake," Maude observed when her adviser had gone back to the laundry. "I shall ask papa if he does not think a couple of young willing girls whom I could train—"

But Nesta broke in with an exclamation of dismay.

"Part with Margaret! Oh, no, *no*; papa would never consent to that! She has served us too faithfully, and too long, to be sent away now she is beginning to grow old!"

"If papa makes it a matter of sentiment—" Maude began, but the tears in her sister's eyes induced her to alter her tone to a more genial one. "After all it is very nice of him, and I shall have to make the best of his ancient retainer. So don't look at me in that reproachful manner, pray! I haven't the least desire to commence my reign with an act of tyranny."

Nesta's face cleared, and to atone for any offence she might have given she began loading herself with rugs and wraps, crying:

"How thoughtless I am to forget that you must be tired and hungry! Let me have the honour of ushering your majesty to your royal chamber," she added, playfully, "that you may change your dress and wash your royal hands before papa comes in, or the boys."

"Oh! those boys!" sighed her sister, preparing to follow, but leaving the rest of her impedimenta on the chairs and the floor. "It is they whom I dread. I am ready to turn coward and run away whenever I think of them."

Nesta was mystified, but before she could ask an explanation Maude was springing lightly up the stairs. While toiling after her the younger girl listened hopefully for some expression of pleasure, some sign that her hard work of the morning was appreciated. But what Maude did say was really this:

"Of course you are going to let me have the room to myself. I don't think I could endure a bed-fellow. I hoped you would put me here, because I remember there is a dressing-closet attached which I can convert into a studio. Ah! here it is, and I was right; the window does face the north."

Before she could finish speaking Nesta had resolved to raise no objection to her wishes; but it was a bitter disappointment to find she was going to be debarred that close companionship, that affectionate intimacy, to which she had been looking forward as one of the pleasantest results

of Maude's coming home. Silently and secretly she would transfer her own belongings to the chamber she would share with Una and Zoe, and try to take comfort in the thought that for the younger of the little girls, if not for herself, it might be a better arrangement. Zoe, like her brother Cleve, inherited the highly nervous temperament of Mrs. Coryton, and was apt to awake in the night trembling and frightened, she could not tell why, and only to be soothed by Margaret's voice or the reassuring clasp of her sister's arms.

But Maude was speaking again, and in accents of displeasure. She was still standing at the door leading to the dressing-closet eyeing the crib placed there for Alfie.

"Is there any necessity for this?" she demanded, pointing to it.

"Aunt Emma liked to have 'Boy' near her," Nesta explained, "because his chest is always delicate in the winter, and he has been subject to attacks of croup; but if you are afraid you would not be able to manage him should he be taken ill—"

This was calling Maude's skill and self-possession into question, and she hastened to reply:

"What an aunt can do a niece can do, and I have had the advantage of attending more than one course of the St. John's Ambulance lectures for ladies. I will show you my certificates when I unpack my desk; but now you had better run away, dear Nesta, or I shall never be ready for the meat tea I hope Margaret is going to give us. It is very unfortunate that I am so

much taller and stouter than you are, for I cannot give you any of my dresses, as I should like to do."

"Thanks for your kind intentions," responded Nesta, forcing a smile; "but as I have enough of my own, why should you?"

She certainly was scarcely recognizable in her nicely fitting Cashmere frock, and smoothly plaited coils of shining hair, when Maude emerged from her chamber and descended with her to the family sitting-room, where Walter and Cleve were romping on the hearth-rug with their pet and plaything Alfie.

They sprang to their feet when their sisters entered, quite ready to be friends with Maude, but somewhat repelled by the stiffness of her salute and her being so unlike Nesta. As for "Boy," after one swift glance at the majestic demoiselle to whom they would have led him, he slid behind Walter, and neither coaxing nor reproofs would induce him to go near her.

Nesta was so afraid her sister's feelings would be hurt that she hastened to offer apologies for him, pleading that Boy was naturally shy, and regarded her as a stranger. In a little while—

"In a little while," Maude interposed, eying the culprit severely, "I shall have taught him to behave better. Under my régime my brothers will find that they must be good and obedient."

Over Cleve's refined features a flush was seen to pass, and Walter made a wry face.

That word *must* from the lips of a girl not quite three years his senior sounded absurd.

Nesta never attempted to dictate to him, nor would he permit Maude to do so.

"I suppose you have had a great deal of experience in the management of boys," he remarked dryly.

"None at all," was the frank response. "This will be my first attempt, and I hope you and Cleve will do all in your power to make it a pleasant one."

She spoke with such smiling yet convincing earnestness that her hearers were softened. Walter put an end to Master Alfie's caprices by carrying him out of the room, and telling him not to come back till he could behave himself; while Cleve politely inquired whether his sister would like to see the splendid illustrated volume on Persia with which a well-known traveller had just presented Mr. Coryton.

But that was papa's knock, and there was a rush of the younger children to meet him at the door and proclaim the news of the arrival; and here came Margaret with the urn, a touch of the gong as she went away again sending everyone to their appointed places to wait patiently till their father, pleased to have all his offspring about him once more, had taken his seat with Maude beside him.

"It was very kind and thoughtful of Persis—Miss Ellerslie, I should say—to send you to us," he observed presently. "I suppose she guessed how lost we felt without Aunt Emma."

"It was not her idea, papa; it was mine, entirely my own," he was assured. "I knew that under the circumstances you must want me dread-

fully, and so I put everything else aside and came."

There was a little surprise depicted on Mr. Coryton's thoughtful features, as if he did not quite understand why his daughter said this so impressively; but he answered with his customary placidity:

"Thank you, my dear; we are very glad to have you with us; but I hope your coming has not inconvenienced Miss Ellerslie. Not even for the pleasure of my little daughter's society would I have *her* comfort neglected. Who has taken your place?"

"Aunt Persis has her maid, who is a very trustworthy person," said Maude, remembering for the first time sundry little offices that had always devolved upon herself, and which Dixon, with all her good qualities, was scarcely fitted to perform. "She has her maid, and there are several persons at Seabay who visit her. Besides which, she has plenty of resources in herself, and—and she made no objections to my leaving her. Of course, papa"—and the speaker's voice took a more assured tone—"of course she must have seen, as I did, that my first duty is to you."

"Objections!" Mr. Coryton repeated and shook his head. "No, no; Persis Ellerslie would be the last person in the world to put her own wishes in the scale at such a moment. Hers has been a self-sacrificing life from her childhood, and will be to the end. Does she suffer much?"

And in his desire to hear the answer to this question, Mr. Coryton put up his finger and silenced Boy, who was climbing on to his knees.

"Does she suffer much?"

"I don't know," Maude replied uneasily. "Aunt Persis never complains. She has delicate health, that is all."

"All! Have you lived so long with a heroine without finding it out?"

But here Alfie, who was clamouring for his father's good-night kiss and the game of romps that preceded it, contrived to put a stop to the conversation. No opportunity of resuming it occurred; but enough had been said to send Maude to rest with a tormenting doubt in her mind as to whether she had acted quite rightly after all in hurrying away from Devonshire, and the generous friend to whom she owed more kindnesses than it would ever be in her power to repay.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST DAY AT HOME.

THE sounds that aroused Nesta from her sleep at early morning were not agreeable ones; they proceeded from the guest-chamber, and consisted of such dolorous howls that she hurried thither to ascertain the cause.

Things had promised so well on the preceding night! When she tucked up Alfie in his crib she had extorted from him a pledge to give as little trouble as possible to his new sister, as he persisted in calling Maude; and Maude, when taken

to look at him wrapped in placid slumber, had kissed his rosy cheek, protesting that she should not be content till he loved her as dearly as Nesta, and refusing the offer of the latter to come to her assistance in dressing him. What then could have gone amiss?

Alas! in spite of Alfie's good intentions, circumstances had been too much for him. By some contrary chance he awoke earlier than usual and trotted barefoot, as he was wont to do, into the adjoining room. But the face there reposing on the pillows was not a familiar one, and he lacked courage to nestle down beside it, begging for a song or a story to lull him into another nap.

This being the case, he wandered about the apartment, climbing on to Maude's unopened trunks, and finally coming to a pause before the table on which stood her very handsome dressing-case, unfortunately left unlocked. To lift the lid and examine its contents would have been a venial crime, but Alfie found a fascination in its contents that carried him beyond mere looking. When Maude opened her eyes he had been for the last hour absorbed in the delightful amusement of keeping a doctor's shop with them.

Such portions of her cherry tooth-paste and camphorated chalk as he had not transferred to his face and night-gown were stirred into a pomade pot with the contents of a small flask of eau de Cologne, purchased in that city, and prized accordingly. Not a tray or receptacle had been left untouched by those sacrilegious and now grimy little fingers, and an experiment was about to be

tried with the cold-cream and a packet of court-plaster when their incensed owner sprang out of bed and prevented it.

Alfie went down to breakfast that morning with the marks on his pudgy arms of the grip they received, and Maude's brow was not quite serene, although, in consideration for Nesta's distress, she had consented to forgive the culprit. Unfortunately, too, the young gentleman's penitence was not as strong as his sense of injury. His hands still tingled with the smart taps inflicted on them with a hair-brush, and he whimpered every time Maude looked across the table at him. In vain did the vexed Nesta strive to mediate; her sister continued to assert that the spoiled boy was a very mischievous, ill-tempered urchin, and not without grounds for the assertion, as Alfie seemed bent on deserving her strictures.

Knowing she had given way to her temper, Maude was not sorry that the necessity of unpacking her trunks gave her an excuse for shutting herself in her chamber till she had recovered her equanimity. And she found so much to occupy her that Una had twice tapped at her door and warned her that the early dinner was waiting before she was ready to descend.

Nesta, in the dining-room below, was suffering for the delay. Margaret had been in and whisked the dishes off the table to carry them back to the fire, declaring that everything would be as cold as stones; the hungry little girls and Cleve fidgeted on their seats; Alfie had to be bribed into waiting with little pieces of bread; and

Walter, who had a long way to walk, openly expressed his annoyance.

"You must teach the new sister that P stands for punctuality, or I shall have to be off without my dinner," he grumbled to Nesta. "If this is fine-lady manners—"

But a pleading "Oh, pray, Walter, hush! I can hear her coming," silenced him, and Maude entered, so radiant and gracious, so unconscious that she had given any annoyance, that no one cared to tell her of it.

As a matter of course she took the head of the table, eating but little herself that she might be at liberty to watch the behaviour of her young charges, whom she intended to convert into model children. They had, however, been sufficiently well trained to give her no cause for reproving them, and she was soon able to relax her vigilance and turn her attention to the simple but excellently cooked fare Margaret provided.

But here Maude, who had peeped into the cookery-books purchased on the previous morning, found or fancied there was room for improvement.

"This pudding should have been flavoured with vanilla," she observed after tasting it. Now the said pudding was one of Margaret's *chef-d'œuvres*, and Nesta cast a troubled glance towards the door leading to the kitchen, trembling lest the critique should have reached the ears of the cook.

"Do you think you could make as nice a one?" queried Cleve, who had a weakness for sweets.

Maude smiled, and drew herself up.

"I should hope so. Before long you shall judge for yourself. I intend spending an hour in the kitchen every morning and relieve Margaret of all the lighter parts of the cookery, such as the pastry and cakes. I have provided myself with the South Kensington recipes, and you, Nesta, shall be one of my pupils."

"I do help Margaret a little," was the reply, given hesitatingly, for the old servant was an autocrat in her domain, and Nesta was wondering whether she would submit to be set aside by a mere tyro.

"And now you shall help *me*," said Maude patronizingly. "Indeed you must, for I perceive I shall be overwhelmed with work till I have matured my arrangements, especially as my evenings must be dedicated to papa. I cannot allow him to droop for want of a companion."

"You do not think he seems dull, do you?" asked her sister with a startled air. "We have always thought him very cheerful, haven't we, Walter?"

"Don't look as if I were reproaching either of you," responded Maude. "I have no doubt that you have been dear affectionate children; but you don't appear to comprehend that papa, with his intellectual tastes, must require more than childish caresses. He needs the companionship of someone who can enter into his pursuits, setting her own aside to converse or play chess with him, and be always ready to listen to any details of his work, and express that sympathy with it that would be so soothing."

"And you are going to be and to do all this?"

asked Walter very gravely, but with such a twitching at the corners of his mouth that Cleve turned his head away to conceal his own amusement.

"Why not?" demanded Maude, whom no doubts of her capabilities had yet visited. "I shall regard it as my principal duty. The other part of the day I shall devote to the housekeeping and the instruction of my brothers and sisters, and I will always contrive to find a spare half-hour for assisting you boys with your lessons."

"How very good of you!" Walter paused on the threshold to exclaim jeeringly. "But, pray, how many books of Euclid have you mastered? and what have you done in algebra? The problem I am hammering at is such a regular twister that I shall be happy to pass it over to my learned sister. I must go now, but I'll leave you my chapter in the Greek Testament to look through, and my paper on physiography. Dear me, what a clever family we are! But I wish our talents enabled us to be ready for dinner at one o'clock."

Away he went to run a race with time if he would be at his desk before the college bell finished clanging, and Maude, slightly discomfited, addressed herself to Neta.

"Is he really so far advanced? Yes, I remember papa saying in one of his letters that Walter was proving himself a clever boy. And he is studying Greek! How I envy him! If I had stayed with Aunt Persis I should have prevailed upon her to send me to Girton. Still, I dare say the fund of general and scientific knowledge I

have acquired will enable me to be useful to Walter; if not, here is Cleve; I shall have more time for superintending his studies."

But the boy shook off the hand laid on his shoulder, crying hastily that he could never learn unless left to himself.

"What an absurd notion!" his sister exclaimed. "Pray, get it out of your head as soon as you can, or I shall be inclined to think the true meaning of it is that you prefer to gabble your tasks in a slipshod fashion, instead of learning them thoroughly."

"Perhaps it is," he muttered so sullenly that Maude commented on it when he had started for afternoon school.

"Is Cleve always so sulky and indolent?"

"Oh, no!" and Nesta timidly suggested that her sister had wounded his feelings.

"Do you think boys of his age are endowed with any? I do not. Did Aunt Emma have as much trouble with him as I fear he intends to give me?"

"Aunt Emma was very fond of Cleve, and patient with him, because his nerves have not been strong since that fever, and if he is excited or works too hard he has bad headaches."

Maude's smile was an incredulous one.

"Our neighbours at Seabay, the Gormans, had two sons who invariably complained of headaches when they were not in the humour to get their themes ready for their tutor.

"But you do not think Cleve would be guilty of such meanness!" cried Nesta warmly. "It would be downright dishonest."

"The young Gormans did it frequently, and I don't suppose it is regarded as a crime in the code of school-boy morality, or that our brothers are wiser and better than other boys of their age," was the careless reply. "But you need not bristle up in their defence till they are accused, you foolish little Nesta. I am quite willing to give Cleve the benefit of the doubt, only you may warn him if you like that I shall be very severe if I detect any attempts at tricking me."

Rising to put an end to a discussion in which she thought her younger sister was taking part more zealously than sensibly, Maude summoned Margaret to assist her in making some alterations she had planned in her bed-chamber and the family sitting-room.

Improvements she called them, while taking down the two or three fine old engravings Nesta had hung over the chimney-piece, to replace them with some of her own sketches in crayons, and the elaborate landscapes in water-colours Miss Ellerslie's affection more than her good taste had prompted her to frame in handsome gilt mouldings.

Improvements Walter did *not* call them when he came home at twilight, and found the old oaken secretaire whose shelves and drawers were common property banished; actually banished, to give place to a table just large enough to hold Maude's desk and leather writing-case, with a formidable pile of new account-books flanking them on the one hand, and sundry volumes on household management and economical cookery on the other.

"I must have a place for my housekeeping

books," Maude explained when she saw the dissatisfaction her brothers did not attempt to conceal.

"Why must you? Nes has never turned the house upside down to make out the weekly accounts and tot up the butcher's bill."

"I hope to manage papa's domestic affairs more systematically than Neta could be expected to do," responded Maud with dignity.

"But couldn't it be done without inconveniencing every one? Cleve and I are wanting papers, or pens, or something or other, out of those drawers every minute of the evening."

"Do you ever find what you want?" he was asked. "The one I peeped into was a chaos. It may make you more orderly if you have to climb to the upper landing for all your belongings."

"And then there's all our books," grumbled Walter, prudently changing to another phase of the subject. "The room doesn't look homelike without them. It's out of all reason to stow them away in a dark corner upstairs!"

Maude pointed to a hanging shelf.

"If—remember, I say *if*—you can find a dozen, or even half-a-dozen, volumes with decent bindings they can stand there!"

"Then poor *Robinson Crusoe* is banned, for he has lost a bone of his back, and *Cook's Voyages* are in tatters, and all our tales of adventures have been read to death. If we are only to have those books here that are smart and fresh, why, you'll find that they are the very ones no one ever cares to open."

"Papa says he likes to see the books well worn that are worth reading," murmured Una, whose

very ragged fairy-tales had been condemned to the flames.

"And Aunt Emma called Walter's and Cleve's drawers their glory holes," lisped Zoe. "She said every one liked to have a glory hole."

"What we like and what is right are two very different things," was the reply. "How am I to make you realize that there should be a place for everything and everything in its place if you talk so foolishly?"

"I hope it won't end in your keeping us in separate boxes with our several goods and chattels hung on pegs around us!" said Walter as he grimly stalked away.

"You left your own gloves on the floor last night," Cleve added saucily; "and your veil was on the table when Margaret came to lay the cloth for tea."

"And Margaret, very properly, folded and brought them to me. It was her duty to do so; it is mine to teach you to wait on yourselves. And for the future, Cleve, I hope you will not cavil at any arrangements I think proper to make, or anything I desire you and your little sisters to do; it is my place to rule and yours to be ruled."

"Bravo, Queen Maude!" exclaimed Walter, who came back for his cap just in time to hear this speech. "Yesterday Granby Villa was a republic, to-day a self-elected queen reigns over us. Hip, hip, hurrah! for Queen Maude, and success to her sovereignty as long as it lasts!"

When "Boy," who vociferously took up the cheering, could be silenced, Walter folded his hands and made a salaam like an Indian before his

rajah, and begged to know whether her majesty would receive the homage of her subjects, and what tribute she would expect from them. He should be happy to lay half a cocoa-nut at her feet, and he knew Cleve had the remains of a pennyworth of acid tablets in his pocket.

But Maude would hear no more. His mocking laughter, echoed as it was by the little girls, offended her, and she gave Alfie, who was dancing round her, an impatient push, and bade him be quiet.

"How very ridiculous you are, Walter! What authority can I obtain if you turn everything I say into a jest?"

"I don't know why you should have any," he retorted. "We are all brothers and sisters. Why should there be all this talk of ruling and obeying? For my part I tell you plainly, I don't choose to be dictated to by a girl."

"Are you going to set me at defiance?" gasped the indignant Maude; "and incite Cleve and Alfie to follow your example?"

She looked so horror-stricken that Walter, who had a keen sense of humour, burst into a merry laugh.

"What nonsense! We all obey papa, and make the little ones mind what Margaret says to them; isn't that enough? And here comes Dad, and Harold Challoner with him. I hope Harold hasn't forgotten those drawings of a steam-engine he promised to lend me."

There was the usual rush to meet Mr. Coryton, and Queen Maude was left standing alone, her refractory subjects having fairly forgotten her.

CHAPTER V.

WITH NO FRIENDLY FEELING.

IT was provoking that when Mr. Coryton came into the room with Boy perched on his shoulder and Zoe and Una playfully struggling to get possession of the hand that was at liberty—intensely provoking that he should come to a halt before the newly-arranged table.

Not that Maude expected anything but praise from his lips; she was too well satisfied with herself to fear his disapproval of her plans; but because he had not come home alone, and as her brothers evinced a disposition to be impertinent in their strictures she did not care to have them commented on before a stranger.

Besides this, Harold Challoner was not the mere school-boy she had expected to see, but a tall, slight, and yet muscular-looking young man, whose age must have been twenty, if he were not older.

He behaved as if he were a frequent visitor at Granby Villa, for he spoke to Nesta with the familiarity of old acquaintanceship; did not appear at all disconcerted by the dignified bow with which Maude acknowledged Walter's hurried introduction; and laughed gaily as he permitted himself to be dragged away that the two boys might tug from his pocket the roll of drawings bulging out of it.

"The poor old secretaire gone at last!" ejacu-

lated Mr. Coryton, with an expression on his face half quizzical, half rueful. "Eheu! I could have better spared a better thing. Who signed the sentence of its banishment? You, Maude?"

"It was intensely ugly, sir," she murmured, deprecating his regrets. "If it had been quaint, or picturesque, or oddly carved, one could have endured with it, but it was neither."

"And so the *ifs* of the young set aside the *buts* of their elders," her father replied; "and yet I could have told you a story or two about that squat ugly piece of furniture which would have made you regard it with more reverence. Your mother used to prize it because it was given to us on our marriage by an aged friend, who filled the drawers with such dainty as well as useful gifts that my poor Mabel shed tears of gratitude as she examined them."

"Do you think, then, that I have done wrong, papa?" asked Maude, with eyes cast down, to hide the annoyance with which she heard her father's remarks.

"You have not sent it out of the house, have you?"

"Oh no! papa, only up stairs; I am sure you must agree with me that in this room it took up more space than we could spare."

"Humph! but who is going to open an office here?" and Mr. Coryton pointed to the array of books and writing materials.

"It's only our royal sister, papa," explained Cleve demurely. "She is going in for book-keeping on a great scale."

"So it appears;" and her father looked so

amused that Maude grew red and white by turns, and could scarcely speak for vexation.

"Is there anything ridiculous," she demanded at last, "in my proposing to keep the house-keeping accounts in a proper manner?"

"Certainly not, my love, and it will be good practice for you; only you seem to have made your preparations, as Cleve just observed, on rather a tremendous scale. My income is not large enough, neither is my expenditure, to fill up those tomes for years. Perhaps we may be able to find other uses for two or three of them."

A cry from Zoe—who had cut herself with the broken edge of a doll's tea-cup—now caused a commotion, and by the time the wounded finger was tied up Maude had consoled herself for the slighting tone of papa's comments. By and by, when he saw how correctly and clearly she kept the despised books, he would appreciate her efforts, and acknowledge that they were well directed.

Harold Challoner was so urgently pressed to stay to tea that he consented, and again Maude was affronted—for instead of being able to draw her low chair to her father's knee and amuse him and herself with a folio of sketches taken in the Nineveh Gallery at the museum, she had the mortification of sitting by silent and unnoticed.

Mr. Coryton was as eager as his two elder boys to hear all their visitor could tell them respecting some wondrous invention in which electricity was to be the motive power instead of gas or steam. They kept up an animated discussion in

which such words as valves and vacuums, pistons and flanges, would reach the ear of Maude frequently, till with an exclamation of dismay Harold Challoner pointed to the clock and started up, and Walter reminded Cleve that they had not written their themes, or looked at their lessons.

As soon as the guest was gone Mr. Coryton went to his own room to write letters, and his daughters saw him no more. Nesta had been busy at her work-basket, for the morrow was Sunday, and there were frills to tack on little frocks, tapes to sew on, and the fingers of little gloves to examine and mend.

To her the evening had passed all too quickly; to her sister, trifling with a piece of high-art fancy work, it had been most unsatisfactory, and, complaining of extreme fatigue, Maude rolled up her canvas, and announced that she should retire early.

Even the sisterly sympathy expressed when she spoke of her fatigue was received ungraciously, for it was exasperating to recall the air of actual enjoyment with which Nesta had often let her hands lie idle in her lap for a few minutes, while she listened to the group of talkers round the table close by. She was not only a pleased, but intelligent, listener to their discussions, for more than once Harold Challoner, detecting a perplexed look in her soft gray eyes, had taken the trouble of demonstrating with his pencil what he, or her father, had been urging; and her few shy questions proved how thoroughly she grasped his meaning.

"Who is he?" queried Maude, smarting under the sense of having been overlooked in favour of a young man with a shabby coat, who could talk of nothing but cranks and wheels. "Who is he? not a gentleman, I am sure."

"Harold Challoner is an engineer," Nesta informed her.

"A common working-man!" ejaculated the young lady. "Is it possible!"

"Not a common one, Maude, for he goes on educating himself, and is 'thorough,' papa says, in whatever he does."

"But still, an engineer; an artisan who works and associates with other men who drink beer, and smoke pipes, and wear the dirtiest of clothes; and you have him here! Good gracious, why *do* you?"

"The Challoners used to be our next-door neighbours," Nesta explained, her needle flying in and out rapidly now, though her fingers trembled a little. "Mrs. Challoner, Harold's mother, was with mamma when she died."

"And for that reason you think yourselves bound to be civil to her son? I don't quite see the necessity. She was paid, I suppose, for her services."

"Paid! Oh! no. At that time the Challoners were living on their means, and Harold was studying for Cambridge; but a great bank failure ruined them, and Mr. Challoner had a fit of apoplexy, from which he never recovered."

"One is always hearing these sorrowful stories," said Maude; "but I suppose yours is a true one. What followed?"

"The two daughters," Nesta went on, "Mary and Liliias, soon found situations as governesses, and Harold accepted the offer of a relative who was willing to apprentice him to the engineering, of which he had gained a little knowledge during his visits to the home of a schoolmate. He did not like the work, but it relieved his mother of the expense of keeping him, and enabled her to go into training as a nurse."

"What an occupation to select!"

"Yes, we all admired Mrs. Challoner for it," responded Nesta, so simply that Maude was ashamed to tell her she had spoken in sarcasm.

"Had they no friends able to do something for them?"

"Plenty; but who cares to be helped if they can help themselves? Now that Harold has overcome his dislike of his trade he takes a real pleasure, as perhaps you saw to-night, in some of the higher branches of it. Papa says he will make his mark some day as an inventor."

"But under present circumstances he is not an eligible companion for Walter and Cleve. I do not like the idea of my brothers being on intimate terms with a man who may come here any day—his bag of tools on his back—to mend a lock or put a bar in the kitchen grate."

"Oh, Maude, how unlikely! Harold is employed by a firm known all the world over for the beauty and excellence of the machinery made by it. I hold my breath sometimes when I hear him describe the perfections to which some of the modern inventions can be brought."

"I did not find his conversation very interest-



ing this evening," retorted Maude with a yawn; "neither would you if you had been accustomed to something better. I am bored to death."

Taking which remark as a hint that she had talked long enough, Nesta gathered up her work, said good-night, and retreated to her chair bedstead and the society of Una and Zoe.

The morrow, as we have already said, was Sunday, and Maude's ambition to be first with her father was gratified by his selection of her as his companion in his early walk to the grave of her mother. She sat beside him at church, she read to him while he rested on the sofa after dinner, and also in the evening, when he was just poorly enough with a bad cold to appreciate lying quietly in the warm room with every sound in the house hushed into Sabbath stillness.

Once, and only once, when Mr. Coryton had fallen into a doze, and Maude was hoarse enough to be glad to close her book, it entered her head to wonder what had become of the children. In the afternoon they had gone with Nesta and Walter to the Sunday-classes they attended; but to-night the brother and sister had quitted the house by themselves. Cleve was curled up in an easy-chair with a favourite volume for Sunday reading; where were the rest?

She went on tiptoe to look for them, and her notions of propriety were offended by finding them in the kitchen.

It is true that everything there was in the neatest order, and Margaret, with Alfie on her knee and the little girls on either side, was reading aloud to them from the large and

profusely-illustrated family Bible; but Maude considered it her duty to take the children away with her, and lecture Nesta very strongly as soon as she had an opportunity.

But though she descanted on the mischief that might be wrought by permitting Zoe and Una to associate so freely with an ignorant woman, their sister was unable to agree with her.

"Mamma had great confidence in Margaret, and Aunt Emma never objected to her having the children with her on Sunday evenings. She teaches them all her favourite hymns and texts, and they enjoy her Bible readings. Besides, it leaves me free to help our vicar's wife with the class of young women who meet at the vicarage."

"Young women! Why, Nesta, what can you do?"

"Not much," was the frank reply; "only my being about their own age seems to make them feel more at home with me, and they often tell me little histories of their troubles and needs they would not have the courage to carry to Mrs. Milsom."

Maude laughed a little laugh that was not pleasant to hear.

"At Seabay I was considered a very efficient teacher, but I should not have dreamed of taking upon myself to instruct adults. What becomes of Walter while you are thus employed?"

"He is in Mr. Milsom's class of lads who are preparing for confirmation; but, indeed, Maud, I do not pretend to teach, I am not vain enough to think that I could do so."

"At your age and with your inexperience, no, of course not; but the fact remains that you have

been dragged into the work, and the little ones have to be left to Margaret. I must talk to papa about it."

"Don't say dragged into the work, because I like it, and papa cheerfully consented to my accepting Margaret's offer to take charge of the children. I don't think you have been at home long enough to understand that she is something more to us than a mere servant."

Maude shrugged her shoulders.

"Aunt Persis values Dixon, who has been with her for years, and she would rather double her salary than part with her, as Mistress Dixon is artful enough to know; but she would never have dreamed of exposing me to the influence and companionship of an uneducated woman, full of the prejudices of her order."

Nesta repeated her gentle "I don't think you quite understand," and then went away, to put an end to an argument which, in spite of her affection for her sister, was beginning to have an unpleasant effect upon her mind.

CHAPTER VI.

FIRST ESSAYS IN THE KITCHEN.

MAUDE came down to breakfast on the following morning looking so fresh and nice in a light gingham dress, guarded from spot or stain with a large holland apron and cuffs, that

Nesta could not refrain from gazing at her. But, alas! she was late; the meal was nearly over when she made her appearance, and Walter had slid on to her plate a card with a capital P pencilled upon it.

However she had a reason for her tardiness, which she gave with heightened colour, at the same time looking severely at Alfie, who was on his best behaviour, eating his bread and milk, and giving so little trouble that his father, with a pat of his curly head, had just called him the best of boys.

Maude told a different tale. He would have to be locked in his room, or tied to his bed, for his meddlesome tricks were intolerable. She had dressed this troublesome charge of hers, and sent him down stairs before brushing her own very luxuriant tresses, or making the discovery that everyone of the pins required for keeping the heavy coils in place had disappeared.

Not till many precious minutes had been wasted in searching for them—not till, heated and angry, she was about to call Nesta to her aid, did she catch sight of her lost property. In one of the flower-pots on the window ledge, bent and twisted out of shape to form a miniature fence around a cineraria, Maude found her missing hair-pins.

For this Alfie was reproved by Mr. Coryton, and so sternly, too, that he hid his face in Nesta's lap and sobbed; but his elder sister did not consider him sufficiently punished, and said so, suggesting that a smart whipping might have a more lasting effect.

The silence of consternation fell on all her auditors. Whip Alfie, the merry, loving, frolicsome urchin who, in spite of his pranks, never hurt a dumb animal, nor played a spiteful trick! Whip "Boy," the plaything and darling of the whole family, cherished all the more tenderly because each succeeding winter had seen him prostrate with chest disease, and Margaret and his father racked with grave doubts whether they should rear him!

Zoe, who was tender-hearted, began to cry, and Cleve muttered "Brute!" between his teeth, careless whether Maude heard him or no. As for Walter and Nesta, they watched Mr. Coryton anxiously; they could remember how once he had caned the former; but it was for a very daring act of disobedience; would he consider Alfie's fault deserving of a similar chastisement?

Apparently not, for as he rose from table he said quietly:

"I think, my dear, we will first try milder measures. I am not fond of fighting if it can be dispensed with. Perhaps Nesta may be able to suggest how to prevent Boy from making himself such a nuisance to you."

"I still think papa would have saved me a great deal of trouble if he had acted as I proposed," Maude observed as soon as he was out of hearing.

"By order of the queen. Hear hear!" cried Walter.

"I thought you said you did not wish to commence your reign with an act of tyranny!" Cleve tauntingly reminded her.

"Oh, but Mistress Maude's monarchy is to be an absolute one," rejoined his brother. "She is like the queens of Spain, who fancied they could do no wrong."

"If I were disposed to tyrannize over you," Maude retorted, "I should insist that you get rid of that hideous mongrel, for the creature is quite out of place in this house, and affords Alfie an excuse to be noisy and dirty."

Get rid of Prim! the sagacious little animal they had had from a puppy! In an instant Zoe and Una were on the floor hugging their menaced favourite and weeping over him; while Boy, withheld from joining them by Nesta, kicked and wailed so loudly that Prim's canine intelligence told him something was seriously amiss, and, lifting up his voice, he too howled his loudest.

Leaving Nesta, the peacemaker, to comfort the little ones and conciliate their elder sister, Walter and Cleve snatched up their caps and satchels and darted away, Maude, finishing her breakfast in a silence intended to denote her displeasure. Bidding Una and Zoe be ready for her with their books at eleven o'clock, she then tucked the *Economical Cookery* under her arm, put her note-book and pencil into the pocket of her apron, and went into the kitchen to give Margaret the benefit of her inexperience.

Mr. Coryton had been heard to say that Margaret's domain was the cosiest spot in the house, and yet it was small, draughty, and in many respects inconvenient.

But then how spotlessly clean and bright! how

orderly! and not only this, but how cheerful! The tins over the mantel-piece shone like silver, and there were a few pots of geraniums in the window that bloomed profusely. Moreover, in the winter evenings Margaret had netted curtains, which were always snow-white; and knitted rugs that she carefully rolled up till the cooking was over; and converted odd morsels of silk into a cover for the table that held her Bible and work-box, with an industry of which she now reaped the benefit.

"Old-maidish" some of the thoughtless girls who held similar situations would frequently call her, and yet they envied her the comforts she had; her neat good stock of clothes, and the quiet evenings she always seemed able to obtain; envied, and yet were too thoughtless or too indolent to walk in her ways!

In spite of her conviction that one of her new duties was to keep Margaret in her place, and exact from her a respect and submission she could not be expected to pay to such a mere child as Nesta, Maude felt somewhat awed when she was face to face with papa's ancient retainer. Margaret looked so sensible, so capable, and so thoroughly mistress of herself and her business, that condescending to her was impossible.

Accordingly, the young lady's opening sentence was very differently worded to what it was to have been.

"My sister tells me she has been accustomed to give you a little assistance in the cooking. Now, I shall be able to be of much more use, and can relieve you entirely of the pastry and puddings,

because I have attended several demonstrations."

"And what may they be?" asked Margaret.

Maude explained as clearly as she could, asked to be shown the store-room and larder, and, having taken a general survey of the premises, decided that the cold-meat dinner should be followed by a pudding, which she would make.

Margaret drew her lips together for a moment. Perhaps she was saying to herself, "This is a *fad*, how long will it last?" but she civilly assented, and Maude went to work.

Practical cookery is very different to theoretical, and watching experienced hands weigh materials and mix and mould them into shape is not quite the same thing as doing it one's self. Notes taken at the aforesaid demonstrations were read and re-read, and the cookery-book studied, till Margaret, briskly washing up cups and plates and going about the kitchen and scullery at her various occupations, began to speculate whether the pudding would be made at all.

It was so difficult to determine which to attempt. Treacle formed an ingredient in one that in other respects seemed promising, but after a peep into the treacle jar the amateur cook felt that she could not endure to meddle with anything so sticky and messy.

Another recipe began with: "Carefully stone half a pound of raisins," and this also was a task from which she recoiled in disgust. Peeling and slicing apples would stain her fingers, while the chopping of raw suet would be equally unpleasant.

Too proud to appeal to Margaret for advice, yet often left in doubt by her book on some essential point, Maude was heartily thankful when she had succeeded in compounding a lemon pudding, and dropped it into the saucepan of boiling water that had long been ready for its reception.

She looked at her watch. Could it really be so late!

"I am afraid I cannot stay to do anything more for you this morning, Margaret."

"What have you done for me, Miss Maude? Of course you've got to have a learning like the rest of us, and 'twouldn't be fair to expect you to be as handy as Miss Nesta, who's never above being taught all I can teach her. But, begging your pardon, missie, you've been more of a hindrance than a help to me this morning."

"You are very impertinent!" exclaimed Maude, choking with mortification. Had she not already declared that old servants were a mistake? Would Dixon have dared to talk to her in this style?

"I don't mean to be that," Margaret responded, "and I think you'll call back what you've said when you consider how much I have to do, and the time you've made me waste in waiting on you."

"Am I not mistress here? On whom should you wait but me?" was haughtily asked; but without answering these queries Margaret in the same even tone of civil expostulation went on:

"You know, Miss Maude, I couldn't go away to my upstairs work, because it's been, Fetch me this, and Get me that, and Pound me that sugar finer, and Grate me that nutmeg, and so on."

"And now you've finished"—Margaret pointed

to the table, bestrewn from end to end with the numerous cups and spoons, basins, plates, and forks, used in that first essay—"And now you've finished, just look at the mess you're leaving for me! When I cook I'm careful not to use anything I can do without, and to scrub the rolling-pin and paste-board, and not spill any flour or sugar. I shall never object to you taking your turn in the kitchen, and I'd be pleased to show you how to do things properly; but don't call it helping me, because it isn't."

"I shall ask papa if I am to be dictated to in this impertinent manner by a person in his service," said Maude as she snatched up her books.

"No you won't, missie," replied Margaret good-humouredly; "you're too sensible a young lady to make him uncomfortable about such nonsense. You're a little bit put out just now, but when you're cooler you'll see that there's justice in what I have been saying."

When the offended demoiselle had swept out of the kitchen, Margaret went and peeped into the saucepan where the pudding that had cost the maker so much trouble and annoyance was briskly boiling.

Smiling to herself, she put the lid on again, and in spite of her hurry to make up for lost time went through a few culinary operations on her own account before clearing away the debris left by Maude.

Long since Una and Zoe had grown tired of sitting with their books before them, waiting to be examined on their acquirements. They had peeped into the adjoining room to consult Nesta.

but she was copying a manuscript for papa, and must not be disturbed.

So they went back to their seats meaning to be good and patient; but idle hands and mischief are always too near akin, and in a struggle for a paper-knife, an ink-glass was upset on the table-cover.

Frightened at what they had done, or, to speak more correctly, afraid of what the new sister would say, the little girls fled to the lumber-room, where Margaret kept a clear corner for their dolls and dolls' house, and were seen no more till Nesta went in search of them.

Not feeling in the mood to play the teacher well, Maude did not regret their disappearance. To-morrow—yes, they should have a holiday till to-morrow, and she would go up stairs and paint a little, or finish the letter begun on Saturday to Miss Ellerslie.

As soon as she entered her chamber she pouted. The quest for her hair-pins had caused boxes and drawers to be turned over, and there was no Dixon here to fold and put away in the most exquisite order whatever Miss Coryton chose to leave lying about after making her toilette. Margaret had made the bed and dusted the room certainly, but she had left a small heap on the dressing-table of collars and handkerchiefs, frilling and ribbon.

Sweeping them all into an empty bonnet-box to be sorted and put away another time, Maude sat down and finished her letter, but it cost her an effort to write cheerfully, which, however, she attributed to every cause save the true one.

"I perceive that I shall have an arduous task here," she wrote, "and may have to call upon papa to support my authority. That I shall, of course, abstain from if possible, but I have already had a little difficulty with the servant, and the boys are, as I feared they would be, troublesome and rebellious, especially the youngest one. It is fortunate for Nesta that I came to her aid, for she lacks courage to assert herself. She is the dearest of girls, and my little sisters are pretty children.

"I hope you do not miss me much," was the concluding paragraph of Maude's letter; "but if you should, pray console yourself with the thought that it was my duty to return home, and, knowing this, how could I act otherwise?"

It was a hurried conclusion, for some one was drumming on the panels of her door impatiently.

It was Walter, and, receiving no answer, he put his mouth to the key-hole—

"Please your majesty, dinner is on the table, and I take the liberty of informing you that two of your subjects will not get half a meal if you do not come directly. The college bell waits for no man, and my legs are not steam legs; they won't do a mile and a quarter in less than twenty minutes."

This remonstrance brought the young lady down stairs as soon as she had washed her hands and smoothed her hair. While dispensing slices of cold meat she heard a whisper go round, that there was a pudding to follow; and it must be a very good one, Zoe added, for the new sister had been busy for hours and hours at making it.

Accordingly every one was expectant, and

Maude's pulses quickened a little, lest her achievement should refuse to come out of the bason or fall to pieces, or prove a failure in some other way.

But no; the first glimpse of it, as Margaret set down the dish and whipped off the cover, banished those fears. Smoking hot, well shaped, and of inviting odour, it was most appetizing to behold; only—

Yes, there was an only, and even Maude surveyed her handiwork doubtfully. It was so very tiny that how it was to be divided amongst so many she was puzzled to know.

"Are you going to put us on short commons?" asked Walter.

"Perhaps it's an expanding pudding like the conjuror's," suggested Cleve. "Cut it and see."

"Won't there be any for me?" queried Alfie dismally. "I don't like such little baby puddings, I like them big."

"I had no idea that it would be so very small," Maude protested. "I am sure I used the correct quantity of ingredients; and after all, it is quite as large as Aunt Persis' cook used to make—"

"For two persons," shouted Walter. "And so you thought it would be enough for seven or eight? What a housekeeper! What a head you must have for figures! Ring for some cheese or jam, will you, Nesta? Why did not you or Margaret prevent Maude making a mistake that has cost Cleve and I the best half of our dinner?"

But here came Margaret to redeem her credit, by setting before the disappointed boys a dish of tartlets; and if Maude in her vexation made some

acid remarks on the folly of thinking too much of eating and drinking, no one took the censure sufficiently to heart to make any reply.

CHAPTER VII.

MAUDE REFLECTS.

AT the end of her first three weeks at home Maude Coryton was surprised to find how little she had done towards establishing her authority, and setting her queendom in order. Certainly the time was brief, but on reviewing the events of each succeeding day it was provoking to be obliged to see that she had not effected any of the reforms which she still felt confident that the household greatly needed.

With Margaret she had established a kind of armed neutrality ever since her father's old servant flatly refused to give up her key of the store-closet unless Mr. Coryton himself desired it.

"It would be most inconvenient, missie," she said, "for me to have to come to you every time I wanted spice or sugar, or you forgot to leave out the things I had asked for. Your dear mother taught me how to be thrifty, your papa has trusted me all these years, and I defy any one to accuse me of ever having wronged him by wasting his money or his goods. There are two keys to the door of the store-closet; Miss Coryton used to have one, and I have always kept

the other, and once a week she and I took account together of what had been used, and what must be renewed. Couldn't we go on with that plan still?"

"I shall refer the matter to papa," Maude responded with a dignity that was meant to overawe this obstinate domestic; but as Margaret assented cheerfully with an "Aye, do, missie, I'm quite agreeable," it could not have the desired effect.

As for Nesta, her elder sister was disappointed in her. Though Maude had always regarded her junior as spiritless and slow, she had expected to find her at one with herself on all points, prepared to champion her cause promptly and ardently, and see with her eyes and adopt her views of everything that happened. Instead of this Nesta had actually dissented from her, not once, but frequently. She was sympathetic enough, listening with the greatest interest to all Maude's complaints, but then she was equally prompt at finding excuses for those who had affronted the angry demoiselle; always so exasperatingly certain that it was just Margaret's bluff way, or that Walter, boy-like, said more than he meant, and that Alfie, who was a frequent offender, was really too young to know what he was doing, and would behave better by and by.

Then, again, Walter and Cleve gave her a great deal of trouble, the one by openly ridiculing her pretensions, the other by a tacit—or she called it sullen—resistance, still more difficult to overcome.

In her best hand she had written out certain

rules for their guidance, and pinned up copies for both lads. Cleve's disappeared within an hour after he caught sight of it, and Walter covered the broad margin of his with pen-and-ink drawings that were the delight of his younger brothers and sisters till Nesta saw and confiscated the paper.

But she could not make either of them forget those sketches of their redoubtable elder sister. Much of the suppressed giggling and sudden bursts of laughter Maude's approach was sure to provoke, and which she attributed to the lack of proper instruction in good breeding, was actually due to their recollections of Walter's performances. Unconscious Maude never knew how she had figured in one place as an Anglo-Saxon queen crowned with the old brown cap on which she had laid violent hands, and seated on a throne so tall that her turned-in toes barely reached the ground; in another as an Amazon attacking Margaret, her weapons a toasting-fork and rolling-pin; again as Minerva in spectacles standing over Una and Zoe with book and birch-rod of gigantic dimensions; and as a Fury with vengeful countenance and streaming hair pursuing Prim the terrier through a bed of cabbages, all furnished by the artist with comical faces.

The secret was well kept, partly because Walter was ashamed of having been the promoter of so much fun at his sister's expense. She knew only that the children, as she somewhat contemptuously termed them all save Nesta, were rude and annoying, and that at the present moment they were more intolerable than on her arrival.

The plans she had so briskly formed did not progress as they ought to have done—her house-keeping, for instance. Until her right to be an absolute monarch was acknowledged by Margaret she decided to avoid the kitchen and occupy her mornings elsewhere; and as Mr. Coryton disliked the credit system, empowering Margaret to pay for all her purchases at the time of making them, there were no bills to enter in the account-books of which she had felt so proud.

Certainly there were Una and Zoe to instruct, but they were not quick at learning, and as Maude fancied they required stimulating she was so terribly energetic that the lessons generally ended in tears. The timid children would have been in despair as well as their teacher but for Nesta, who would come softly in, putting aside the writing she was doing for her father, to mollify the one and lend her kindly aid to the others.

As for Alfie—"Ah!" Maude told herself with a sigh, "it would be long, very long, before she succeeded in breaking in the restless urchin, whom all his relatives conspired to spoil!"

After finding him seated on the floor with her paint-box on his lap, trying the colours with the tip of his tongue, and converting the back of his hand into a palette, she had insisted on banishing him from the dressing-closet.

Accordingly a corner was found for his crib in Walter's room, and the result was that no one in the house obtained any rest after six in the morning.

This made as little difference to Mr. Coryton as

to Margaret. She rose early to get forward with her work; while her master had long been accustomed to prepared himself for the day's labours by taking a country ramble before breakfast.

It was Maude whose matutinal slumbers were too frequently broken by the frolics of her brothers; the roars of laughter, the bursts of song, the heavy thuds against the floor and walls as pillow fights were carried on, or the bedstead converted into a train or ship for the amusement of Boy. In vain did Margaret complain of torn pillow-cases, and Her Majesty gravely assure the culprits that such conduct could not be tolerated; the temptation to enjoy a good game at romps with the merry child, who woke them with his kisses, always proved irresistible, and Maude lectured in vain.

Neither had she secured the pleasant intellectual evenings with papa that were to have been her solace for the trials of the day. Mr. Coryton was preparing for the press a work on geology, his favourite science, and in this he absorbed himself. There were always a certain number of pages to revise, neatly copied by Nesta from his almost illegible manuscript, besides printers' proofs to correct, which he could only do to his satisfaction in the quiet of his own chamber.

Then again Granby Villa was unusually gay with visitors. There were two families of girl cousins living within walking distance, and these young people were eager to renew their acquaintance with Uncle Coryton's eldest daughter.

They were not very intimate with Nesta,

partly because she could rarely find time to return their calls, partly because they had an impression that she was inclined to be goody-goody. But they regarded with different eyes the young lady who had been adopted by a rich spinster, and who, from having travelled in Germany and spent a winter near Paris, must be able to supply them with the newest French fashions.

Ada and Evelyn Marriott were the daughters of a widow, whose small income they might have increased by their own exertions, but that pride intervened. It would be too degrading to teach or to work for the shops, they protested, especially as dear papa's relatives moved in the best society. So they preferred pinching and screwing, and owing the flimsy finery in which they bedecked themselves to the good-nature of the above-mentioned relatives, whose gifts—intended to promote Mrs. Marriott's comfort—were spent in keeping up appearances.

How Ada and Evelyn envied Rose, Lily, and Violet Templeton, the daughters of a well-to-do city man, who gave them a regular allowance for their clothes, it is not pleasant to dwell upon. Outwardly they all were excellent friends, with many tastes in common, and all prepared to admire Maude, and accept her as an addition to their circle.

And Maude was quite willing to receive their admiration and return their visits, although after each meeting she would feel ashamed of the gross flattery with which she had permitted herself to be plied.

She knew that she excelled them in many

accomplishments, and that she possessed a talent for description, and could make such clever word-pictures of persons and places she had seen that even Walter and Cleve, who were not disposed to give her much credit for aught she did, would listen delightedly.

But her cousins, though they called her darling, and "dearest Maude," and would pose around her in attitudes of rapt attention, did not care in reality to have their minds enlightened.

Neither did they take any interest in the pursuits in which she aimed at excellence, and always contrived to bring the conversation round to the one subject that filled their thoughts—how to outvie their acquaintances in the elegance of their costumes and bonnets. They were never such gratified auditors when she talked of the paintings at the Louvre as when she mentioned having been taken to some of the principal shops in the Palais Royal.

No, the evenings monopolized by her cousins had not left any agreeable recollections, and Maude knew she was none the better for them. Altogether, the retrospect in which she was indulging depressed her. She had hastened home intending to do so much, and as yet could only record failures.

However, her spirits soon revived, for had she not faith in herself? Did she not feel confident that all her vexations arose from the obstinacy and ingratitude of those she wished to benefit?

It was a great relief to know that Mr. Coryton was bringing his work for the printers to a close. Nesta had copied the last folio of the MS., and

the last packet of proofs would soon be despatched. This done Maude knew she would be able to have papa to herself for a portion if not the whole of the evening; to him she would not mind confiding her perplexities, for he would assist her in ruling her turbulent subjects, and—she blushed as she admitted the necessity of this—and advise her how to withdraw gracefully from too close an intimacy with her cousins.

But Zoe and Una were at her door tapping for admission, so Maude's meditations were put to flight, and the pencil with which she had been making a few random strokes in a landscape intended for Miss Ellerslie was laid aside.

"Papa has come home. Had you forgotten that it is Saturday, when he is always earlier? And Nesta is helping Margaret get tea at once, because afterwards we are going—all of us—to Hampstead to see the sunset. Papa says it promises to be glorious. Oh, please make haste, that we may start quickly!"

"And there's someone else here," added Una, her rosy face dimpling and sparkling with delight, "someone who is going with us; but I am not to tell you who it is; Walter says it will be such a pleasant surprise for you. So be quick, be quick, I can hear Margaret rattling the tea-cups."

"Stay," and Maude in much agitation caught hold of the little girl as she was running away: "has Aunt Persis come to town? is it she?"

But Una laughed roguishly and put her finger on her lips.

"You should not ask me, because I am not to tell. Don't you like pleasant surprises? I do."

Maude finished her toilette with unsteady fingers. If Miss Ellerslie had come here to re-claim her adopted daughter, was she prepared to go? to tacitly acknowledge that she had not proved herself the household treasure she intended to be?

Certainly *not*. She refused to be discouraged by the past, she was looking forward hopefully to the future, and nothing should induce her to desert her post. Presently, when she had had fair play—

But the gong was sounding, the signal that the table was set, the urn carried in, and Mr. Coryton, who did not like to be kept waiting, would sign to Nesta to take her sister's place, unless she were there to fill it herself.

But ere she glided into her seat Maude glanced across to the window at which the guest was standing conversing with her father. Was this the pleasant surprise that had brought her down stairs in a flutter of expectation? The grave young face turned towards her on her entrance was that of Harold Challoner.

Confused and perhaps disappointed she recoiled a step, and in so doing struck with her shoulder the dish of gingerbread nuts Margaret was about to place on the table. Away went the pile of cakes—some on to the tray, some on to the head and into the lap of Alfie, while one dropped on the carpet close to Prim, the terrier, as he sat by the high chair of his little master waiting patiently for the bread and milk always saved for him.

But the sight of such a delicious morsel falling

almost into his mouth was too great a temptation to be foregone. In an instant the cake was gripped and Prim scurried out of the room to his kennel, from whence he would return presently with drooping tail and penitential air, to creep under Nesta's chair till his canine sagacity told him that he was forgiven.

CHAPTER VIII.

MUSIC AND MUSIC.

EVERY one laughed at the fall of the ginger-bread and rapid flight of the dog, except the original cause of the mishap. She was too much offended at the trick Walter had played her to join in their mirth.

"A pleasant surprise indeed!" she mentally ejaculated, with a contemptuous toss of her stately head, "to be obliged to pour out tea and pay the customary courtesies of the tea-table to a working engineer!" One too with whom her thoughtless brothers were on such confidential terms that she almost believed it possible they would hold her up to him for ridicule.

Thinking thus she sat behind the urn, only speaking when pointedly addressed, and declining, on plea of a headache, to join the rest in their ramble.

Nesta instantly proposed to stay at home too. If Maude felt ill, or out of spirits, how could she

bear to leave her? But the offer was rejected with such a decided "I prefer to be alone," that the loving heart of the younger sister was troubled. What had she done to deserve such a rebuff?

"Was it her fault?" she sorrowfully asked herself as she went to prepare for the stroll looked forward to until now with so much pleasure; "was it her fault that Maude did not seem"—and here, for want of a better, she used one of Walter's school phrases—"did not seem able to get on with her?"

Instead of drawing closer together they were drifting apart. Instead of sharing the same pursuits—reading, working together, and making the home duties easier and pleasanter by their mutual labours—the elder sister set the younger entirely aside, scarcely appearing to hear, and certainly not expressing any thanks for her timid offers of assistance.

Maude acted as if she had taken as her badge the Latin motto, "*Aut Cæsar aut nullus*," and in her eagerness to be Cæsar she quite overlooked Nesta's claims to be considered.

"I dare say the fault is in myself," sighed the latter in her humility, "I dare say I am not at all like the girls with whom my dearest sister has been associating. They may be almost as accomplished and brilliant as she is, whilst I have always been slow and stupid. I can feel the difference between us keenly, though I do not grudge her the talents and other advantages she possesses. No matter who comes here Maude is never awkward or embarrassed. Whilst I am

racking my brains for something to say she steps in, bright, beautiful, witty, and self-controlled, and with a few gracious little speeches sets every one at their ease. No wonder our cousins rave about her; she is all they say of her, and they are not prouder of her beauty and talents than I am. If she would but make a few allowances for me, as she does for Violet Templeton, and let me love and help her in my blundering way, how very happy we might be!"

But Nesta had to wipe away the tears that glittered in her eyelashes, and force a smile, for both Una and Zoe were clamouring for her assistance. Fortunately for herself she rarely did have an opportunity of indulging in sentiment. Her brothers and sisters—Maude not excepted—had long since discovered that no one was so clever at finding lost gloves and pocket handkerchiefs, buttoning small boots, and tying the strings little hands were pulling into knots, as Nesta.

Then before they could start there was Alfie to pacify, that young gentleman protesting loudly against being left behind, and refusing to believe that he was incapable of walking as far or as fast as the rest.

Not till he condescended to listen to the blandishments of Margaret, and went into the kitchen with her to weigh caraway comfits in a pair of tiny scales and share them with Prim, could Nesta tear herself away. But she forgot to be sorrowful as soon as the invigorating breeze that swept over the heath fanned her colourless cheeks into a glow, and those were happy moments when she stood leaning on her father's

arm and watched the sun sink in the west amidst the glories of a sky such as painters often essay to depict, but how vainly!

Mr. Coryton had been the last to leave the house, for he lingered behind to place a small packet in the hands of Maude.

"Take care of this till I return," he said. "You can examine it if you like, but remember it is to be kept a profound secret till we are all together again, when we will have a grand presentation."

What could he mean? Was this another surprise? Then she would have nothing to do with it, but make the pain in her head, which now ached in reality, an excuse for going to her room, if not to bed.

But Mistress Maude was not as free from curiosity as she imagined, and though she disdained to take advantage of Mr. Coryton's permission and open the packet she bathed her temples with cold water and pronounced herself sufficiently recovered to remain down stairs.

Laden with wild flowers, prettily-tinted leaves, curiously-marked stones, and—greatest treasure of all—a forsaken bird's nest, the young folks came home rosy and merry, proclaiming that they had had a delightful walk, Walter adding that papa and Harold had been as jolly as the rest.

As soon as their excitement had subsided Mr. Coryton called his children around him, and with Alfie on his knee and Margaret smiling approval at the door, he called upon Maude to produce the packet, with which in his hand he turned to Harold Challoner, who looked as surprised as the others.

"No one can admire more than I do," he said at the same time, "the modesty that shrinks from praise or public recognition of a brave deed, but that is no reason why an act of bravery should not be recognized."

Here Walter broke in impetuously:

"I know, I know! I was sure it was Harold who saved those two boys when the ice broke, and no one else would venture to go near them. He was the young man that held them up till ropes and a ladder could be brought, and then went off in a cab refusing to give his name. I always thought from the description, and his being in bed for a week with rheumatics, that it must be he!"

"A hero, a real hero!" cried Cleve; "let's all do him honour, and put a wreath of laurel on his head, and shake hands with him all round."

But Harold put his behind him, laughingly declining to undergo any such ordeal, and Mr. Coryton demanded silence.

"You boys have spoiled my oration, but you mustn't deprive me of the pleasure of presenting to our hero—"

Another interruption, this time from Harold himself.

"Don't call me that, pray, Mr. Coryton. It was impossible to feel less heroic than I did over that affair. I only went to the assistance of the poor little chaps because—well, I suppose it was because no one else did. I could not stand on the bank and see them perish!"

"And for this action, which I am not allowed to call a brave one," was the reply, "the Royal

Humane Society empowers me to present you with this medal, which your mother will prize, young man, if you do not."

"My mother, oh, yes!" and with the softened expression stealing over his features they always wore when she was mentioned, Harold accepted and examined the gift; and if his colour deepened as he read the inscription it bore, he now blushed with pleasure as much as manly shame, that his heroism should be thus publicly rewarded.

Walter and Cleve plied him with so many questions respecting the occurrence, refusing to be satisfied till they knew exactly how he felt before he went in the water—what were his sensations when he had both the boys clinging to him, and whether he had expected to be drowned with them—that at last Mr. Coryton took compassion on their victim, and forbade the persecution.

"Let us have some music. We have scarcely had any all the while I have been so busy with my book, and yet there is nothing so restful to the brain. Open the piano, Cleve."

"I will play for you with pleasure, papa," said Maude, rising with alacrity. "You shall never have occasion to lament the lack of sweet sounds again."

Without hesitation she fetched a roll of her favourite pieces, and placed herself at the instrument, for Maude knew that constant practice and excellent masters had rendered her a brilliant player.

She was also a correct one, never slurring a

difficult passage, but executing every trill and cadenza with a precision only to be acquired by hours of positive hard work.

Up and down the keys flew those slender fingers, watched with astonishment by Walter and Cleve. The sonata she had chosen was a long one, but the presto movement at the end was played with unflagging energy, and followed by a fantasia in which there was so much use of the loud pedal that Mr. Coryton wrinkled his brows, and drawing his chair as far away as he could sat with one hand over the ear that suffered most acutely.

"What would you like next, papa?" queried Maude when the final crash of chords ceased to vibrate. "I have something here by Thalberg—variations in five sharps—and a Capriccio by Liszt which cost me three hours' practice a day for a month before I had mastered it. Shall I play that?"

"No, thank you, my dear, I had rather not hear it," her father replied hastily. "I should be thinking all the while of what it had cost you. Come and sit by me and rest those poor little hands. How tired and stiff they must be!"

"What were those pieces about?" asked Cleve perplexedly. "I did not understand them at all."

"Neither do I understand you," his sister retorted, amused that this obtuse lad should pretend to criticise the work of a great composer. "When your ear is educated you will not ask such questions."

"Is my ear in fault?" asked Cleve with the same dubious look.

"Certainly; at your age you cannot have any musical capacity."

"There I must beg to differ," said Mr. Coryton. "Mozart had evinced his marvellous talent before he was as old as Cleve. The old adage of a man being born a poet may also apply to a musician."

"But Cleve is not musical," his sister quickly replied.

"He has not learned to play any instrument, neither have I, and yet I can appreciate and enjoy harmony so thoroughly that there must be music in my soul though I lack the power of expressing it."

"What I meant was this," Cleve persisted in explaining: "before Nesta begins to play anything difficult she tells us what was in the composer's mind when he made it up. Then you seem able to follow his thoughts, and to know whether they were sad or joyful ones."

"Ah, yes!" cried Walter, "I know what you are thinking of; that pastoral what you may call it, that begins as if the morning were just breaking and the birds waking up. Then you hear them twittering, and the blacksmith clanging his hammer, and the children singing, and a little stream rippling over the stones, and—and all sorts of pleasant sounds that make you think of Highgate Woods and Epping Forest, and wish yourself at either."

"Talking of Nesta, where is she?" inquired her father. "Oh, here she comes! Let us have some of your music, my dear; something that will harmonize with the twilight; you know what I prefer."

And Nesta obeyed, her elder sister sitting spell-bound, while on the piano from which she had been eliciting such volumes of sound, a touch far more delicate and sympathetic than hers could ever be, evoked melodies, songs without words, such as haunt us long after the notes have died away.

No one moved or spoke as long as Nesta discoursed that dainty music. Mr. Coryton closed his eyes, and his lips quivered occasionally as if his thoughts were with the dead. Harold Challoner folded his arms across his chest, and sometimes smiled to himself, sometimes frowned, as if he too were dreaming; and the two lads squeezed themselves into one chair close to the instrument, proving by their silence that they also were wrought upon by the sweet sounds.

"Aren't you going to sing us anything?" asked Cleve when Nesta paused.

"Yes, let us have one or two of your old ballads," came from Mr. Coryton's corner; and involuntarily Maude ejaculated, "Can Nesta sing?"

It was Harold Challoner who replied, "She has the sweetest voice I ever heard. Is it possible that you did not know it?"

But the singer had commenced, and Maude was spared the necessity of replying.

A quaint old English ditty to please Mr. Coryton, a more modern one for Walter, and a Welsh air wedded to martial words at the request of Cleve, and then Nesta, after letting her fingers stray over the keys for a few seconds, raised her voice in one of the most devotional of our evening hymns. Her brothers and Harold Challoner

took up the strain. It was an appropriate ending to the day and the week. Margaret hummed it to herself over her needlework. Alfie in his little bed up stairs awoke and sleepily joined in the "Amen," and at its close the guest said his adieux, for it was getting late, and every one made the discovery that they were heavy-eyed and ready to go to rest.

Una and Zoe were sleeping soundly after their merry races with papa, when, careful not to disturb them, Nesta moved about the room on tiptoe making preparations for the following day.

There were the little piles of clean garments to be laid in readiness for each child in the orderly fashion on which Aunt Emma had always insisted; the best frocks to be hung where they could reach them, and tucked under each pillow the prettily illustrated text or verse they learned and lisped to their father when they bade him their Sunday good-morrow.

But some one was tapping sharply at the door, and, finger on lip, Nesta opened it, expecting to see Margaret with some article of apparel kept back for airing or mending.

It was Maude who stood there, so pale, so strange, that, recollecting she had complained of not being well earlier in the day, Nesta would have put her arms about her sister and tenderly questioned her.

But the proffered embrace was repulsed, and in such a decided manner as to make it evident that Maude was more angry than ill.

"Will you step into my room?" she said frigidly. "For your own sake I prefer to speak to you

where there will be no chattering children to overhear it."

And, wondering much what this could mean, Nesta meekly followed her sister.

CHAPTER IX.

STORMY MOMENTS.

AS, with the imposing air of an offended monarch, Maude led the way to her own chamber, she was struck in some small degree with the incongruity of her three sisters being crowded into so small a space, while she was allowed to appropriate the best room in the house.

But she could not dwell upon this just then. The anger—repressed with difficulty in the presence of her father and Harold Challoner—had grown fiercer and fiercer the longer she brooded over her fancied injuries, and now burst upon Nesta to her intense astonishment.

"Why," she was asked in accents intended to strike terror to a guilty soul. "Why have you been deceiving me, *deliberately* deceiving me?"

Before any answer could be made, Maude went on with withering scorn:

"I knew you were sly; my cousins hinted that the first time I went to see them; but I did not know that you could be as hypocritical and ready to exalt yourself at my expense as you have proved yourself this day."

By this time Nesta was incapable of replying. So extraordinary, so unexpected, were these accusations that she was completely bewildered by them. Was it possible that she heard Maude correctly! Could this frowning girl be the elder sister whose affection she was so eager to win, the sister who was actually calling her a deceiver and a hypocrite!

"You make no reply. I suppose you cannot defend yourself, and so you are prudent and say nothing," cried Maude with scornful bitterness. "Ah! if you could realize how much you have disappointed me! I came home assuring myself that you would be my right hand, always cheerfully ready to assist me in the arduous task of managing for papa. I knew I should have trouble with Margaret and the children; I was prepared for that; but not to find you ranging yourself against me!"

Nesta roused herself now and would have protested that she had never dreamed of acting such an unsisterly part, but she could not obtain a hearing. Maude felt her wrongs more keenly as she dilated upon them, and refused to be interrupted.

"I could not understand how it was I failed in all I tried to do for papa's comfort. It perplexed me to find Margaret so bent on thwarting me, and the boys always rude and rebellious; but I see it all by the light of this evening's work. You have been secretly my enemy. I suppose you looked upon me as a rival, and resolved before I got here to do your best to drive me away."

"We are sisters," Nesta broke in with a sob,

"motherless sisters, bound together all the closer by the greatest loss girls of our age can have. Do you forget that when you say such dreadful things as these?"

"No, it is you who must have forgotten it," was the moody response, "or you could not have treated me so unfairly."

"But, Maude, you are mistaken, you are indeed! Oh, dear, it is so difficult to believe that you are in earnest! Tell me that you are not, that you are only saying these dreadful things to try me, and then we shall both sleep more happily."

"I am not in the habit of saying what I do not mean;" and Maude retreated further from the hands extended to clasp her own. "You have cruelly wounded and humiliated me, and I don't feel as if I could ever forgive you for it."

"But what have I done?" asked the culprit.

"I have told you, or if I have not your conscience has."

"Aren't you exaggerating my offence, whatever it may be?" queried Nesta, half inclined to smile at Maude's reproachful looks and speeches. "Pray tell me in what way I have vexed you, that we may kiss and be friends before we go to bed."

"Do you think I can ever be friends with you again?"

"Oh, Maude, this is terrible! You cannot know what you are saying. Is your head worse? Do lie down and let me bathe it for you. If I am in the wrong I am very sorry. I cannot say more, can I?"

But there was no appeasing the angry girl, who answered excitedly:

"Do not touch me, do not come near me! I

called you hypocritical and deceitful; you are giving me more and more proofs that I am not accusing you falsely. I espoused your cause, as I thought a sister ought to do, when Rose and Violet spoke against you; but it seems that they did you no injustice after all."

Nesta was beginning to lose her temper too, and she spoke in colder prouder tones as she refused to hear anything her cousins might have said respecting her.

"If they do not like me I cannot help it. I have never done them any injury, and so they may say what they please. But you, Maude, you ought to do me more justice, for you know I cannot be happy while you think ill of me. I do value your good opinion; I would not willingly offend you; and as for having wantonly hurt your feelings, I would not, could not do it."

"This is mere talk;" and Maude resolutely turned from the tearful eyes whose pleading glances affected her in spite of her efforts to appear indifferent to them.

"Well, then, if you will not give me any credit for affection," and Nesta dashed her tears away, "give me some for common sense. What have I to gain by making my own sister despise and detest me?"

"If you want me gone—if you are plotting to drive me back to Aunt Persis—"

But the speaker was silenced with a stern "Hush, Maude, for your own sake do not say any more! This is too degrading, too contemptible. How sorry and ashamed you will be when you are calmer!"

Maude tried to make a passionate retort, to insist that she was justified in her cruel suspicions; but before the resolute attitude of her usually yielding junior she had to give way.

"I will not listen to you any longer," said Nesta firmly, "unless you will quietly tell me what has given you this strange impression of me. Quietly, mind! If you are determined to heap reproaches on me that mean nothing—"

"Nothing! I may have spoken warmly, but who would not have done the same?"

"How am I to answer, while I do not know what ails you?" and a little disdain of such childish scolding and raving began to mingle with Nesta's eagerness to be enlightened. "It appears that I have contrived to say or do something which has very much displeased you; but what can it be?"

"As if you did not know!" said Maude sarcastically

"I do not know," was the reply, spoken with an earnestness that would have been convincing to any but an angry, and therefore unreasonable, person. "Why not tell me? Why keep me in the dark?"

"Have I not been kept in the dark?" Maude retorted. "When I went to the piano to-night did any one whisper to me: Take care! there is a better musician in the room than you are?"

"Not better," murmured Nesta, and brought upon herself a fresh attack.

"You need not contradict me. I am not so puffed up as not to know that my pretensions are to the merely mechanical, while you are really gifted

But that makes it harder to bear. No one had the honesty to say to me, While you are playing and fancying that you delight your hearers they are laughing in their sleeve at you, for they know that this demure Nesta, who pretends not to be capable of doing anything, is only waiting her opportunity to triumph over you.

"I could have borne this," and Maude clenched her hands in her rage—"I would have borne it with a good grace if you had been content with lowering me in my own eyes; but I cannot forgive the ill-nature with which I was permitted to make myself ridiculous in those of a stranger, that Harold Challoner!"

"There can be but one opinion of your playing," she was assured; "it is astonishingly brilliant. If I were to attempt such difficult compositions I should soon be in despair."

"You are very generous with your praises; it is a pity you were not equally so with your warnings," sneered the implacable Maude. "Common honesty should have led you to tell me I must yield the palm as a musician to my younger sister."

"I don't remember that you have ever asked me whether I played or sang. Had you done so, I should have answered truthfully that Aunt Emma, my chief teacher, was very proud of her pupil."

"You ought to have told me, but you did not. You preferred to keep your secret till you could inflict a malicious snub upon me. Of course, that man, as well as the boys, was highly amused at what he would call my conceit, and the clever way in which you punished it!"

Maude's wrath had now reached the stage of hysterical sobs, and her perplexed sister fetched her some water, and stood by in mute distress till her patient was quieter. Nor then did she enter upon her own defence.

"You had better let me help you undress," she said gently. "The clock has struck twelve; it is Sunday morning, and if papa should hear us moving about he will be anxious and come to see what is the matter."

Too much exhausted by her own violence to make any objections Maude sullenly permitted herself to be assisted in taking off her clothes; but not another word was spoken by either sister till she had with face averted laid her head on her pillow.

Then it was that Nesta, refusing to see the gesture that bade her go, said a few words slowly and unsteadily.

"You have many talents, Maude; God has given me but one, and a very precious gift it has proved since our mother died. Sometimes when papa has come home tired and sad, looking as if he missed her dreadfully, my singing of "Oh rest in the Lord," and "I know that my Redeemer liveth," has soothed him. Perhaps he will ask me for them this evening and I shall sing when he bids me. But could I do so if I had wronged you even in my thoughts, you, my sister?"

And then Nesta went away, surprised to find herself trembling and weeping. She had not rebutted the accusations made against her, feeling that it would be useless to do so until Maude herself felt and acknowledged their injustice.

She was glad she had been forbearing, and brought no counter charges against her mischievous cousins. She was also thankful that she had refrained from making indignant replies when called a cheat and a hypocrite; but even the knowledge that she had choked back two or three sharp answers did not prevent her from feeling intensely miserable.

To know that you are misunderstood by one whom you dearly love, is always a severe trial to a sensitive mind, and though Nesta had seemed calm enough as long as she was with her sister she was suffering acutely now. If Maude thought so meanly of her how could they ever live happily together? The consciousness of being suspected of deceit would throw a cloud over their daily intercourse, for Nesta was neither courageous nor energetic by nature, but apt to shrink into herself and appear sullen when in reality she was only unhappy.

She had crept into bed shivering less with cold than agitation when suddenly some one leant over her, and Maude sank on her knees and laid her head on the pillow that was moist with her sister's tears.

"Can you forgive me?" she murmured—"forgive my evil temper, my injustice? I saw it all as soon as you left me, and marvelled that you were so patient. You will never tell any one, will you, how vain, and selfish, and spiteful I have been?"

And Nesta's affectionate embrace was sufficient reply.

CHAPTER X.

DISCUSSING PLANS.

WHEN the sisters met on the morrow it was Nesta who was demonstrative, and talked faster than usual. She had seen at a glance that Maude's eyes still showed traces of the tears shed on the previous night, and was anxious to shield her from remark.

So pensive and subdued was Maude, that once Mr. Coryton observed it, and would have inquired the cause if Nesta had not perceived his intention, and contrived to prevent it. When her father looked at her again the sisters were exchanging such affectionate smiles, that he concluded all was well, and thought no more about it.

But Walter and Cleve were more observant. It was not like "her majesty" to sit absently playing with her spoon, and never speaking except to rebuke the little girls for being troublesome to Nesta, or to silence the hungry Alfie by rising to supply his wants herself.

So great a change must have a cause. The lads had often grumbled to each other at the unfairness of Madame Maude sitting at the top of the table to be waited on, while poor little Nes filled cups, cut bread, or buttered toast for papa. What had made her so considerate all at once?

They seized Nesta as she was crossing the hall, and questioned her.

"What's the matter with our lady queen? Has

Miss Ellerslie sent for her, and is she breaking her heart at the thought of leaving me?" asked Walter.

"And me?" added Cleve. "You must give us an extra supply of pocket handkerchiefs, Nes. But are we really going to lose her?"

"No, no; and recollect you are speaking of your sister, Cleve."

"Oh yes! we know all that; but what does ail her? Have you revolted, as you ought to have done long ago, and given her to understand that she is not going to lord it, or lady it, over us any longer?"

Nesta cast an apprehensive glance towards the open door of the breakfast-room.

"Let me go, please, Walter. Papa would not be pleased to hear you and Cleve talking such nonsense this morning. Besides, it is not only unfair to Maude, but very painful to me."

The lad kissed her roughly, but lovingly.

"I'll never vex you if I can help it; but you might answer us. If you don't, I shall begin to think that her majesty is meditating some 'norful' deed by which we shall all be made to suffer."

"Then you would think wrongly. To oblige me—do; there's dear boys—leave Maude alone."

A request urged in such pleading tones could not be gainsaid, and the result was a peacefully happy Sunday.

The sisters walked to church together, and in the evening they talked long and fondly of their mother, recalling many a precious, if saddening, recollection of the days when she was with them, the brightest, the most active of them all.

The week began well in every sense of the word, and on Monday morning, when the boys and Mr. Coryton had gone their several ways, Maude took Nesta into her counsels and frankly confessed that so far her reign had not been a flourishing one.

"Of course I need not tell you that I want to be thoroughly useful at home; to take mama's place—"

"No one can do that," murmured Nesta with a sigh.

"I suppose not; but you give me credit, I hope, for my good intentions. You believe that I came here proposing to do my duty both as a daughter and sister?"

"Indeed I do!" was the prompt reply. "I have never dreamed of doubting it; and am I not very glad to have you? When Aunt Emma went away I felt so lost, so lonely! Though Margaret did her best to cheer and encourage me, I was often tempted to shut myself up somewhere, and have a good cry."

"Then you did need my help! I did act rightly in coming! And yet everyone has seemed to oppose me! No, not you, Nesta dear, nor papa; I must except you two; but there is Margaret; her behaviour has been most provoking."

However Nesta would not concede this.

"What makes you think she has been deliberately rude to you? She is always slightly brusque, though we do not notice it. Aunt Emma used to be amused with her North Country frankness and quaint remarks. Besides, you must remember that to her we shall always be the children she nursed as babies, and who were

taught, as soon as they could speak, that they must obey and respect nursie."

"And she presumes in consequence," added Maude quickly. "However, she has many good qualities—you see I do not attempt to disparage her—and I must endeavour to be less sensitive to the impertinence of an ignorant woman. I do not mind her rude speeches half as much as the contrariness of the boys."

"When you get used to them—" began Nesta, but stopped as she saw her sister draw herself up haughtily.

"I hope I never shall get accustomed to slang, and noise, and untidiness, and ill manners!"

Nesta could not let this sweeping condemnation pass without a protest.

"I am sure, quite sure, that our boys are not a bit worse than other boys of their age. No, nor so bad as many I could name. You are too hard upon them, Maude, you really are!"

"If you say so, I suppose it must be true; but if all you can advance in their favour is that they are not the worst specimens of their kind, why, it is not very consoling. We have to live with Walter, and Cleve, and Alfie; and even you, with all your partiality for your tormentors, must admit that the house is in a turmoil as long as they are in it."

"Naturally it is," Nesta conceded.

"Then it follows, as you say, *naturally* that they ought to be made to behave better, and not be a nuisance to their elders."

"They are not a nuisance to me," said Nesta so warmly that Maude was piqued.

"Because you set up for a saint, and think the best way of doing it is to let everyone bully and impose on you," she retorted severely. "But—but—" and the good resolutions of the previous day came to her aid—"I did not mean to speak crossly to you, so forgive me; only, do not persist in taking the part of those tiresome urchins when you know as well as I do that they are in the wrong."

"Not always in the wrong, surely!" smiled Nesta. "Walter teases us, but it is not unkindly, and Cleve is very warm-hearted, though his headaches often make him irritable. As for Alfie—"

"Ah, yes, let me hear what you have to say in defence of the aggravating child who makes his little sisters as troublesome as himself, and contrived to pull over your flower-stand this morning, and break a couple of your best geraniums."

"He was trying to reach the canary's cage to give the bird some groundsel, and the chair slipping he caught at the wires of the stand to save himself. That was not deliberate mischief."

"Then it was an impromptu mess, and we had to thank Master Alfie's rashness for it. Even you must admit that."

"Yes, though I was too thankful at his escaping unhurt to consider the breaking of a pot or two worth notice. Do you think, dear Maude—don't be offended—but do you think you make sufficient allowances for the little ones?"

"My dear Nesta, it seems to me that you pass your days in doing that. By and by you will regret that you are so very indulgent."

Nesta reddened, but did not reply. She knew

that dearly though she loved her brothers and sisters, devoting herself to them with the most unselfish affection, she had never knowingly permitted them to do anything that was actually wrong. And they could have told Maude that, in spite of her gentleness, she could and did reprove any of those little acts of meanness and unkindness, which the best of children will sometimes commit, almost as sternly as papa himself.

Maude saw the rising flush, and repented her sharp speech.

"I did not mean to vex you," she protested; and Nesta recovered her good-humour.

"I am sure of that, and perhaps a little more energy on my part has often been wanting, but you will take into consideration that until a few weeks since I had Aunt Emma to rely upon. So you must make allowances for me as well as the rest. Auntie used to say that it is so natural to healthy children to be restless that the only way to keep them out of mischief is to keep them employed, and she had had far more experience than you and I."

Maude smiled.

"It is very generous of you to couple our names so prettily, but it is not you who lose your temper as soon as the little monkeys get too provoking."

"I am afraid I do, much more frequently than you are aware," Nesta was honest enough to confess. "Walter often irritates me with his nonsense, and Cleve is dreadfully trying when it draws near the half-yearly exams, and his lessons begin to worry him."

"I can fully believe it," was the ready response. "If it were not unladylike I think I should shake that young gentleman into better behaviour. How do you bear with him so patiently? I do not know. Can you give me your recipe?"

"Sometimes I count twenty, like Dickens's Tattycoram; sometimes go away till I know I can speak without saying anything for which I shall be sorry afterwards."

"I had rather stay and make Master Cleve submit himself to my authority. A struggle for the mastery in which he sustained a defeat might be a good lesson to him."

"Not a struggle between a brother and sister; oh no!" and Nesta looked so troubled at the idea that Maude did not pursue the subject.

"It is quite a relief," she cried playfully, "to hear you acknowledge that you can be cross as well as the rest of us. I could not talk freely or live at peace with perfection. I detest perfect people, though poor Aunt Persis is as nearly—"

But something rose in Maude's throat when she attempted to speak of the gentle friend and guardian she had been too ready to forsake, and she began to talk of herself.

"If the tricks of the boys worry you, just imagine how much more keenly I feel the annoyance, I who come to you from a quiet house where children are unknown. At Seabay my wants and my wishes stood first with the whole household; here, the children have to be considered before anyone else; their clothes, and their food, and their education and amusements, must all be provided for instead of one's own pursuits and

pleasures. And that brings me to the question I want to discuss with you."

Nesta regarded the speaker rather anxiously. What was she about to propose?

"We ought to come to some arrangement respecting the housekeeping. I do not like to think that all this time you may have been looking upon me as an usurper, but I did not know till an hour ago that you used to regularly assist Aunt Emma. Zoe was my informant. If she spoke correctly why should you not assist *me*?"

"I have taken part in all the home work for nearly two years," Nesta replied. "Aunt Emma knew her stay here was uncertain, so as soon as I was old enough she began to teach me how to manage."

"Then you can cook?"

"Fairly well," was the modest reply.

"Which means that you can satisfy Margaret, whom I shall never succeed in pleasing, possibly because I shall never try. But tell me what else you can do, that I may know where there are openings for me."

"Openings!" echoed her sister in some perplexity.

"Yes; we will not let our pretensions clash; there shall be no rivalry, Nesta."

A speech that brought a painful flush into Nesta's cheek.

"How could we ever be rivals? Are we not both of us equally dear to papa? the two motherless girls on whom he depends for all the help and comfort we can give him?"

Maude covered her eyes for a minute or two

and squeezed the hand laid on her arm; but she soon raised her head again to kiss her sister lovingly.

"You are a dear good girl, little Nes, and I don't suppose we shall have many misunderstandings; but it will simplify matters if we resolve to make certain duties wholly our own, and not interfere with each other.

"For instance," she continued, when Nesta did not speak, but contented herself with listening attentively; "for instance, as you like cooking and do not mind Margaret's *brusquerie*, you shall continue to lend a helping hand in the kitchen."

Now it happened that Nesta did not like cooking at all. She was apt to be seized with faintness if she stood over the fire too long; but she refrained from mentioning this, and Maude went on:

"Then in the intervals of pastry-making, &c., you can keep the linen and store closets in order; and I shall not mind if you take the bed-rooms off my hands, for I have never been accustomed to dusting, or even to putting away my own dresses. Margaret was quite rude to me last Friday, saying outright that if young ladies pretended to dust they ought to do it thoroughly."

"I will continue to keep all the other rooms in order," said Nesta after a little hesitation, "but I do not think I shall be able to undertake yours."

"Perhaps you consider me rather unreasonable for proposing it,"—and now it was Maude whose colour rose,—"but I thought that it would give me more time for Una and Zoe's lessons—both those children are so very backward.

"Papa does not think so; he always says he prefers a slow and steady progress, especially while they are so young. Then, again, he wishes me to keep up my own studies."

"So you shall, and I will do the same. We will read together for a couple of hours daily, and practise diligently for two more; and I will teach you drawing and perspective; and help you with your French, in which, judging by the books on your shelf, you must have made a little progress. Oh, we will work hard, Nesta, and to ensure our doing so, it may be as well to draw up a time-table for our guidance."

"You must not forget to leave a margin for the children's daily walk"—Maude made a wry face—"as well as the needle-work. There is always a great deal of that to be done in so large a family."

"I will take care that it does not press too heavily on you," Maude promised.

"It does just now," Nesta frankly made answer, "for Una and Zoe will soon require their summer frocks, and Aunt Emma cut out sets of shirts for each of the boys before she went."

"Why not call in a dressmaker and a needle-woman?"

But Nesta shook her head and said something about the expense. With the plain hemming and sewing Margaret was always willing to help her a little.

"Indeed you shall not be dependent on Margaret's clumsy fingers," she was promptly told. "I do not care for needle-work, but I will learn to like it, as it is a good housewife's duty to

do so, and I have no doubt that I can relieve you entirely of the making of the children's dresses. I have a critical and quick eye, and know what are the latest fashions. Give me the material presently and I will decide in what style to make it up. Our little ones' costumes shall be artistic as well as fashionable."

"But they must be simple or papa will not approve."

Maude curled her lip, amused yet scornful.

"As if I did not know that simplicity is the only true style for childhood! You may leave it to me entirely; I am sure my taste is correct enough—it was acquired in Paris, to please far more critical persons than papa."

In spite of these assurances Nesta could not help wishing secretly that her sister had not been so determined to take the making of the little dresses entirely out of her hands. During one of the last shopping excursions with Aunt Emma, the requisite number of yards of a pretty useful woollen stuff had been purchased; and during one of the last confidential chats with her she had taken some pains to suggest how they could be made with least trouble to Nesta, and yet suitable to the coming season and the young wearers.

Nor had Miss Coryton's thoughtful kindness stopped there. In the midst of her hurried preparations for her voyage she had found time to assist her niece in taking measurements and cutting patterns, so that Nesta had been able to look forward to her task without much fear of failing in it. Now, although she would not

permit herself to doubt Maude's being equally successful, she was sadly afraid that artistic toilettes would not be as useful or as satisfactory as the less elaborate ones she had proposed.

However, Maude was in high spirits, and so well pleased with herself that it would have been cruel to mortify her with objections. So Nesta kept silence, reflecting that when the frocks were actually commenced it would be quite soon enough to urge the prudence of adhering to Aunt Emma's patterns a little longer.

CHAPTER XI.

FOUR FRIENDS NOT MY FRIENDS.

NO misgivings troubled Maude's peace for some hours. She had atoned for her foolish fit of mortified vanity, and felt quite satisfied that she had put everything on a more comfortable footing for the future.

When Walter and Cleve came home to tea they found her too much absorbed in a fresh task to notice their entrance.

Nesta's work-basket had been banished from the table under the window to make room for her writing-case; and the little girls whose prattle she found disturbing would have been sent to play in the garden if Margaret had not interposed a warning that the ground was too damp to allow of it.

So they were penned in one corner, with strict injunctions not to speak above a whisper, while their elder sister ruled and re-ruled a sheet of cardboard for a time-table, bent on arranging her several *duties*, as she loved to call them, so that they should not interfere with the keeping up of those accomplishments in which she desired to be proficient.

Walter peeped over her shoulder and smiled quizzically. "Where are you going to hang this thing when it is finished? and where is Nesta's? If you are going to be joint rulers you must both act on the same scheme of government, mustn't you?"

Maude hesitated.

"Cannot she guide herself by mine?"

"Ah, yes—how stupid of me not to think of that!" Walter gravely responded. "Nothing can be more simple. Her majesty's chief lady-in-waiting is to do everything that her majesty does not intend to do. What a very convenient plan!—a sort of what's yours is mine, but what's mine is my own!"

"A most ridiculous comparison!" cried Maude in her displeasure. "Nesta and I fully understand each other, and have come to an excellent arrangement."

"Precisely," answered Walter with the same demure air. "But is it an excellent arrangement for one or both?"

"For both. Oh, you need not say 'indeed!' in that sneering tone! We have divided our work, so that it will not press heavily on either of us. If you still doubt me, read this."

Walter scanned the items of the time-table, and laughed and shrugged his shoulders till the provoked Maude insisted on knowing what he found in it so highly entertaining.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, except—there are always exceptions, aren't there? If I mention mine, your majesty will not order out your body-guard and send me to the chopping-block to be cut shorter, will you?"

"If you could explain yourself without being absurd!"

"Anything to oblige. And after all, what do my objections signify? I merely noticed what seems to have quite escaped Queen Maude's piercing eyes."

"And it is—"

"That while your day does not begin till after breakfast, Nesta's commences long before."

Maude bit her lip. She could not deny this. It was not she who dressed Alfie, brushed out the curly hair of Una and Zoe, and then ran down stairs to lend a helping hand to Margaret in setting the breakfast-table and preparing some dainty little dish wherewith to tempt Mr. Coryton's capricious appetite.

This was a provoking oversight, especially as early rising did not recommend itself to a young lady who never dreamed of leaving her chamber till the coffee was ready to be poured out.

Still Maude had plenty to say in self-defence.

"I have not been accustomed to such early habits, neither do I see any reason why Nesta and I should be the slaves of Margaret. In the dressing of the children—who, by the by, should

be taught to wait upon themselves—I shall cheerfully give any assistance in my power; so you may consider that objection quashed.”

“And I may go on to the next?” queried Walter.
“What! are there more?”

“A few—just trivial ones that have escaped your majesty’s notice. How grateful to me you ought to be for drawing your attention to them!”

“Go on,” said Maude in tones that were anything but grateful; and her brother pointed to the time-table again.

“Two hours at the piano; does that mean two for you and ditto for Nes? Have you reckoned how long the poor old Broadwood will stand such tremendous wear and tear?”

“I don’t know,” she replied sharply, “why I answer questions only put for the purpose of annoying me. But if you really want to know my intentions, you can. I purpose getting some duets that Nesta and I may practise together. I have two or three in one of my trunks, very brilliant ones, that I will look for by and by.”

“And *you* will play the runs and shakes, the crescendoes and the diminuendoes, while Nes supplies the bass, the tumty-tumty-ti and dum-dum-dum, one, two—one two—here a thump and there a pause. How nice for her! how she will enjoy her hours of practice!”

Maude dashed her pen across the division set apart for music.

“No one shall accuse me of treating Nesta with injustice. Unless she consents to take the treble I will never play a note with her—never!”

“Don’t punish the poor child for my misdeeds,”

Walter entreated. "As classical music is not her forte, think what a disappointment it will be to her if you will not permit her to attempt it."

"I do not know what you mean," responded Maude in sullen tones. "And perhaps you are in the same predicament; but you may be able to give me a reason why my younger brother always thinks himself at liberty to criticise what I do and say."

"Gently, my queen; you gave me that liberty—the freedom of the subject, you know."

"I should call it the impertinence of a conceited school-boy," Maude retorted. "But here, at all events, there is nothing for even you to find fault with. I have so arranged my timetable that I shall be able to devote at least one hour entirely to Nesta herself."

"And why to Nesta?" asked Cleve, who was standing by.

"That she may continue her studies—take lessons from me in drawing—"

"No use," interposed Walter. "She has made two or three attempts, but never succeeded in doing anything but worry herself; so papa begged her to give it up."

"Under my tuition she may yet become a tolerable artist," Maude persisted. "If not, she shall improve herself in French, learn a little German—it is so useful nowadays, and—"

But here both the lads broke in, half-amused, half-angry.

"To hear you," cried Walter, "no one would think Nesta won medals and certificates in all her classes at the High School!"

"And as for German, hasn't papa himself taught her!" added Cleve. "What makes you talk as if she were a regular ignoramus, and it was extremely kind of you to patronize her? I don't like to hear it."

"How could I know these things?" demanded his sister, sadly disconcerted by the attack. "It was only natural for me to think that I had received more education than Nesta. Have I not lived abroad and had the best of masters?—advantages by which, I hope and believe, I have endeavoured to profit."

"But Nes has had papa," she was reminded by Cleve, whose faith in his father was unlimited.

"And she had Aunt Emma, who passed the higher exam. at Cambridge," said Walter. "Ah, it would have done *you* good to have known her!"

"If our aunt is as clever as you say," observed Maude, shifting her ground, "why has she made such a great mistake as going to the colonies?"

"That's a queer question for a learned young lady to ask. Aren't clever women wanted there as well as here!"

"But not to undertake the drudgery of a farm in the bush. Just imagine, if you can, a person who can appreciate Tennyson and Macaulay, laying aside her books to make dough and butter!"

"She used to make puddings and pies for us when she was here, but it never prevented her enjoying a scientific lecture or a concert."

"She cannot go to either now," Walter was reminded; but he turned away in a pet. As if people lived only for amusements! As soon as he

was old enough he intended to join Mr. Healey if papa would give consent. Did Maude suppose he would be any the worse farmer for knowing the whys and wherefores of a good many things he should see and have to do at the other side of the world?

Here an interruption occurred, and Maude put her time-table out of sight; nor was it ever finished. She was obliged to confess that in her judgment of Nesta she had been too hasty, and must cease to regard or treat her as an ignorant child.

But unfortunately the discovery that her younger sister's mind was as highly cultivated as her own, and that if she were the better artist Nesta was incomparably her superior as a musician, did not lead to a fairer division of the household management.

It is true that Maude had been the first to propose it; but, like all impetuous persons, her activity was more apt to display itself in fits and starts than in steady industry.

There could be no occasion to lay aside the book she found so interesting, if Nesta could hear the little girls read and recite just as well; and as for their sums, why, Nesta was fond of arithmetic, while to her it was detestable. Neither did she ever feel inclined to put aside some more agreeable occupation to assist in the weekly stocking mending.

Not that she deliberately refused to do so. Maude still talked of her duties, and how impossible it was that she could ever neglect them; but her part in this particular one consisted

so much more in complaining that boys made such holes in their hose than in steady attempts to fill them up, that if a visitor's arrival gave her an excuse for laying her work aside, her help was scarcely missed.

As for Una and Zoe's summer frocks, they cost Nesta a great deal more trouble than if she had been permitted to make them herself. Amateur dressmaking is more difficult than it appears, and Maude's share in this essay dwindled down to some braiding for the plastrons and cuffs.

But she could not be induced to substitute a simpler pattern for the elaborate one first selected. The consequence was that the work proceeded slowly. Even then it interfered so much with the completion of a landscape she was anxious to send to Miss Ellerslie on her birthday, that eventually the frocks were finished off in haste and worn without those very additions she had insisted on being allowed to contribute.

Mr. Coryton, who found in his eldest daughter an intelligent companion during the few hours he was at home, knew nothing of her frequent battles with Alfie, who feared more than he loved her, nor ever heard the wrangling with Cleve and Walter, from which she seldom came off victorious.

Nesta, to whom all the disputants would appeal, and to whom they were equally dear, began to look harassed. Keeping the peace is a wearing task when it becomes the business of one's life, and terribly depressing to the spirits of a nervous sensitive person.

Nor was the peacemaker able to enjoy the

consolation of feeling that she was doing any good. On the contrary, Walter became more satirical, Cleve more prone to take offence, and Maude to give it. The outspoken Margaret declared that the young folks were getting so tempery that the house was unbearable; and if they did not alter of themselves something would have to be done; a mysterious threat that generally awed Boy and his younger sisters, and was not quite without influence with the elder ones.

Before Miss Coryton left England she had entreated her friend Mrs. Challoner to watch over her niece, and bade the latter go to Harold's mother and consult her unhesitatingly in any difficulty that might arise; but how could Nesta do that while Maude retained her prejudices against Harold?

To such an extent did she carry them that on one occasion, when Mrs. Challoner was known to be in the neighbourhood and might be expected to call, Maude went off to spend the afternoon and evening with the Marriott girls.

"I am sorry to vex you, you foolish little Nes," she said on meeting a reproachful glance; "and if I prefer the society of my cousins and equals to that of your friends you ought not to blame me. I daresay they are very estimable and all that, and perhaps it is what we ought to do—claim kinship with all ranks and grades of society; but my tastes do not lie in that direction. Kiss me and let me go. You will enjoy your model nurse and working-man a great deal more if I am not by taking notes."

"And you, shall you feel at your ease at Mrs

Marriott's, knowing that in going to her you have deliberately slighted an excellent woman, whom our dear mother loved and papa honours?"

Maude flung off her hat in a pet.

"If you are going to gird at me in that style I shall have to stay at home, but you will be obliged to make excuses for me, for come down stairs I will not. The Challoners may be all you describe them, but their position is not mine, and I do not care to make their acquaintance."

"Then you had better go to your cousins," was the reply. "If you are in the house papa may either fetch you down himself or take Mrs. Challoner up to see and prescribe for you. After all, the loss will be yours, not hers."

This was the sharpest thing she had ever said to her sister, and Maude retaliated by declaring that it was evident Mrs. Challoner was dearer to Nesta than she herself.

However, quarrelling with the peacemaker was an impossibility. To her gentle "Nonsense, dear, you know better than that!" a deaf ear might be turned; but when she came running to the gate with the roll of music her sister had forgotten, how was it possible to refuse the kiss of reconciliation she proffered!

The repentant Maude went farther. Remembering to have heard Nesta express a regret that she had not the skill to paint a wreath of wild flowers on an envelope case made to send to Aunt Emma, she undertook it herself, and for several days to come spent her afternoons in her studio, working steadily in her pleasant task.

But presently such close application made her

head ache, and, carefully locking her colour-box lest Alfie should find his way to it, she went down stairs to ask Margaret for some sal volatile and bespeak Nesta's sympathy.

She found the latter seated at her desk, the table strewn with open notes and directed envelopes, the writer's finger travelling down a list of names and addresses that lay beside her.

What could this mean?

Maude stood at the door looking on till she fancied she had solved the riddle, and, stepping lightly forward, her headache forgotten, she cried in playful accents:

"Have I found you out, oh! mysterious maiden? Were you preparing a real surprise for me? I know what you are going to do. My birthday comes in a few days, and you have planned a party in honour of it."

CHAPTER XII.

NESTA'S DAY.

YOU are not very much disappointed, are you?" inquired Nesta, when she had reluctantly told her sister that she was in error.

"No, I don't think I am;" but Maude's voice contradicted the assertion. "It would have been a pleasant little excitement; but I know few people here, and fewer that I like. Violet Templeton is horrid, and Rose is almost as bad

Unless you talk dress and millinery they haven't a word to say. And the Marriotts speak so rudely to their mother that I often find myself blushing for them!"

"But," she began again when her remarks elicited no reply; "but you do not tell me what it is makes you so busy. Are you honorary secretary to some charity, or are you going to hold a missionary meeting, or get up a bazaar? Don't say you propose giving a juvenile entertainment. There are small torments enough in the house already. To have another dozen or more let loose upon us would be too, too much!"

"I don't believe you mean half the peevish things you say," smiled Nesta. "You would enjoy seeing Una and Zoe have a good romp with their little neighbours quite as much as I should. But don't be afraid; we keep such merry-makings as those for cooler weather."

"Then what do these mean?" and Maude glanced at the notes her sister was folding and sealing.

"They are invitations to *my* party. You do not seem interested in my class, or I should have told you that with papa's help they and I are to have a day in the country, as we did last year."

"Yes, where do you go? To the sea? Is it a monster excursion with hundreds of children and a band and banner? If so, accept my pity. It may be a charming day for the youngsters, but it is positive hard work for those who are in charge of them."

"Papa does not think me old enough, or strong enough—I am not sure which—to take an active

part in such an affair as you are describing. My girls and I are satisfied with a more homely trip."

"To the Crystal Palace, I suppose, or the Zoo?"

"No, we prefer the genuine unadulterated country, and fortunately we are able to have it. Margaret has a sister married to a small farmer in Essex, some of whose fields abut on the loveliest wood you ever beheld. Last year Mrs. Smith kindly said, that if we liked to go down to her place before the cowslips were over, she would provide tea and milk for us, and papa allowed me to accept the invitation. It was such a delightful day, Maude! We were made free of the cowslip meadow—we roamed the wood, went over the farm, saw the cows milked, inspected the dairy, and wandered about the great garden and orchard, coming home at dusk loaded with flowers—both wild and garden ones—besides ferns, and herbs, and ivy. The girls have talked of it ever since! How pleased they will be when they receive these notes and learn that we are to have just such another trip next week!"

"Why, you are quite animated over it; and yet it must be almost as fatiguing a day as if you went with the annual excursion!"

"But it gave all of us so much to think about. I wish we could live in the country part of the year, instead of always in London."

"But you spend a few weeks of the autumn at the coast, don't you? Everyone does now."

"We have not gone anywhere for these three years. Papa's expenses are so heavy just at present that he could not give us a sea-side holiday without trenching on the sum he is putting by

to give Walter and Cleve a fair start in the world. There are so many of us to clothe and feed and educate, that it does not leave a very large surplus when everything is paid for."

"And I," thought Maude, "have come home to be an additional burden to him. And yet not a burden either, if I thoroughly educate my little sisters and save him the expense of masters for them in drawing and music."

With this flattering thought she drove away the unselfish regret and continued to question Nesta:

"How do you go to this Essex farm?"

"It is an hour by train from Liverpool Street, and then a mile by a field-path to Mrs. Smith's gate."

"Is your party a large one?"

"About twelve in all. The superintendent of the school objects to larger classes than each teacher can comfortably manage."

"I had twenty in mine at Seabay, and kept them in excellent order," observed Maude importantly.

But she omitted to add that she had once overheard the remark that her discipline was better than her teaching; her scholars sitting quietly enough, but with none of that intelligence and interest depicted on their young faces which her sister succeeded in evoking.

"Twelve!" she repeated musingly. "They are very rough children, aren't they? I mean they are drawn from the families of costermongers and so on. I recollect that fact, because I know it struck me with surprise that papa sanctioned your taking such a class. Do you have the en-

tire charge of them when they are set loose to be as wild as they please?"

"Aunt Emma went with us last June; this time I was thinking of asking Mrs. Challoner to chaperon us."

Maude's eyebrows were raised, and her lip curled directly.

"May I inquire why you select *her*? Is it to have some one at hand who can extract thorns and bind up scratched fingers? You can have no other reason. If it were merely for the support of some elder person's presence why not ask Mrs. Marriott or Mrs. Templeton, both of whom are relations. It is odd that you should set them aside for a stranger!"

"Now, Maude, don't take such queer notions in your head," entreated the vexed Nesta, "but put it to yourself if either of the persons you have named would care to undertake such an office. Mrs. Templeton is so afraid of snakes and other creeping things that she would not let us venture into the wood or the long grass by the roadside; and Mrs. Marriott tires in walking from her house to ours. How, then, should we get her from the station to the farm and back again, without mentioning the stiles she would have to climb?"

"Still I don't see why this Mrs. Challoner must be brought into the affair."

"Because I like her," answered Nesta boldly; "because I know she would enter into it and enjoy the day in the country as much as I shall. My only fear is that she may not be able to get away—she is always in request."

"If it is merely companionship you wish to have, why cannot you be content with mine? But you have not paid me the compliment of inviting me to go with you."

Nesta hastened to apologize for the omission, assuring her sister—and with truth—that she had not imagined she would care to be included in such an excursion.

"Neither shall I; but I could take my sketch-book and bring back a few ideas for that clump of trees in my landscape. Yes, I will go with you. I'll not say with pleasure, because going on a railway journey with a pack of children is sure to attract attention to us that we could very well dispense with; but for your sake, my good little sis, I would do more than that."

"And Mrs. Challoner?" queried Nesta in coaxing tones. "I am sure you would like her if you knew her."

"If she is invited I shall not go with you," said Maude coldly. "I do not think you are very grateful. No sooner do I consent to lay aside all my objections and be your companion, than you turn round and hint that you would rather have some one else. Do so then; I can stay at home."

Nesta could have retorted that she had never concealed her desire to have the society of Mrs. Challoner, and therefore these remarks were unfair; but she would not wilfully hurt the feelings of her sister, and was quite unhappy till she had succeeded in appeasing her.

This effected, Maude began to evince a great deal of interest in the day's outing. She watched the weather; spent part of Miss Ellerslie's birth

day gift in sweets, although assured that it was quite unnecessary; and even took the trouble of converting into breast-knots, to be worn that day, several yards of blue and white ribbon she happened to have by her.

Margaret gave more useful assistance by cheerfully devoting a morning to the making of plain wholesome cakes, scones, and tartlets, averring that good food and plenty of it was as necessary in making Nesta's outing a success as the railway ride and the caller air; and Mr. Coryton presented his grateful daughter with a little purse containing the return fares of the whole party, and a small sum for possible emergencies.

But he demurred at the arrangement when he heard that her only companion was to be her elder sister.

"This is not very flattering to me, papa!" Maude exclaimed. "Do you think the responsibility of keeping a dozen girls in order is more than I ought to undertake?"

"Not exactly, but I should have preferred your having an older person with you; however, I may be able to join you myself in the course of the afternoon. I have heard of some very curious fossils having been found in a marl-pit on the neighbourhood of Mr. Smith's farm, and have been trying to find leisure to go and inspect them. I may as well go that day as any other.

Maude was too much affronted by the doubt her father's remarks conveyed, to say more till the eve of the appointed day, when she demanded suddenly who was to take charge of Una and Zoe.

"They do not go with us," Nesta replied. "Papa says I—we shall have quite enough to do without having the care of our little sisters on our mind."

"And Alfie? But we *must* take him. I have promised, and I never break my word even to a child."

Seeing that Nesta looked dubious Maude added hastily:

"Now do not raise objections! He shall not be any trouble to you. He quite understands that. It is the condition on which I made my promise. No *but*s, please! The truth is, I believe I was rather unjust to him this morning."

"You mean *very*," said Nesta, her heart swelling at the recollection of an occurrence that had cost as much pain to her as to Boy.

"Don't exaggerate, pray! It is unladylike as well as untruthful. When I found my portfolio upset, and my sketches scattered in all directions, was it not very natural that I should think it was the work of his meddling fingers?"

"Before shaking and scolding him you might have listened to his assurances that *he* had not been into your room. Margaret said she had warned you that if you did not fasten your window this strong breeze would blow it open, and throw down your easel."

"Margaret is always quoted whenever I do anything amiss. I am sick of her name. As for Alfie, he made as much fuss as if he were hurt, and—and if I make him amends by giving him a day's outing, surely you might assist me in atoning for my offence instead of putting obstacles in the way."

"I do not wish to do that," and Nesta pictured to herself the delight with which the merry little fellow would gambol about the fields; "only there is a large pond in the farmyard, and he is sure to haunt it, and an accident happens so quickly."

But Maude's impatience would not allow of more.

"Pray don't be so old-womanish, and do give me credit for a little common sense! I have told you that I intend to take upon myself the entire charge of Alfie, and so I will. If anything goes wrong—which it will not—the blame is mine, not yours."

After this what could Nesta do but solace herself with a hope that one of the twain would be in a forbearing mood, and the other in that placable state called by Margaret being on his best behaviour!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ESSEX FARM.

AFTER filling young hearts with hopes and fears, the weather, long doubtful, took a favourable turn. There was a gray dawn and a threatening of rain, but just as the skies were at their darkest the clouds began to disperse, and before noon, the hour appointed for assembling at the railway-station, the sun shone out gloriously.

Nesta's toilette, a shady hat and a pretty and useful gingham frock, was soon made; but Maude's was such a lengthy affair that many an

anxious glance was cast at the timepiece on the bracket in the hall before she came down stairs, buttoning the many buttons of her Suede gloves, and pronounced herself ready.

A very charming figure she presented with her delicate light silk dress, white hat, and lace parasol; but the touch-me-not style of the attire she had chosen seemed to prove that she did not intend to take any share in the actual labours such a day always entails upon those who take the management of it. And yet it was not out of any unkindness to Nesta that she was thus unsuitably dressed. The young lady, who had been accustomed to leave her wardrobe to the care of Dixon, had so neglected it since her arrival in London that she had nothing more serviceable to put on.

Two of her pretty prints were in the wash that week, in spite of Margaret's protest that she could not spare time to get up so many light dresses. Another wanted new buttons, another must have the gathers mended, and a couple of yards of loose kilting rendered a third equally useless. There was a smudge of oil-colour on the front breadth of the gray beige made in Paris, and who could wear cashmere on such a melting day as this threatened to be?

Awed by the vision of such a grand lady, Nesta's scholars scarcely ventured to speak above a whisper till they reached their journey's end, and one of their baskets of provisions having been handed over to Mrs. Smith, their teacher led the way to the piece of level sward shaded by some fine elms where they were to dine.

Maude staying behind to make the acquaintance of the farmer's wife, they saw no more of her for some time, and if occasionally Nesta found herself yearning to know how Alfie was progressing, the many calls upon her attention rendered it impossible to go and ascertain.

Through the wood, and through the wood, and into every dell and dingle the young explorers dived, one bringing with her, to be carried home to mother, a prickly spray of wild rose. She had often heard mother talk of nettles, she said, and this must be one, because it stung your hands when you touched it.

So many roots of primroses, and cowslips, and dog-violets, and wood-anemones were carefully dug up to be taken home and potted, that presently it became necessary to point out to their happy owners the impossibility of transporting them all to the London courts and alleys they were intended to brighten.

Nesta was assisting at a selection of the most likely to survive their removal, when the blowing of a cow's horn summoned the whole party back to the farmhouse, where good-natured Mrs. Smith had set a table on the grass plat beneath the bay-window of her best parlour, and added huge dishes of her home-made preserves to the new milk and farm bread and butter she insisted on being allowed to supply.

Here they found Maude rather weary of her office, and her young charge not quite as clean as when he came, but very jolly.

It is true that he had ventured too near the bees, and been warned off by a sting from one of

them; and he had been driven out of the farm-yard by a belligerent turkey; but while Maude sat in a shady bower sketching, he had been introduced by Mrs. Smith to the cowshed and the dairy, seen the pigs, fed the fowls and ducks, as well as a couple of broods of fluffy chicks, fished for minnows in a tiny stream that helped to fill the duck-pond, and, greatest treat of all, made acquaintance with a couple of puppies, and the same number of kittens. These animals, being brought up together, were the best of friends, rolling and tumbling over one another, or lying in a furry hairy mass side by side in the lap of their delighted visitor.

There would be time for another frolic, Nesta decided, when tea was over, and the question asked, What shall we do next? But as there must be no more straying out of hearing of the cuckoo-clock in Mrs. Smith's kitchen, the young people adjourned to the orchard, where "whoops" and "touch," and similar games were merrily played.

Even Maude joined in for a little while. With her hat thrown off and her hair dishevelled through catching in the long boughs of the hoary apple-trees, she was dodging half a dozen pursuers when she caught a glimpse of a group of ladies and gentlemen coming down one of the green vistas.

Nesta recognized her father in the elder of the gentlemen, and quietly disengaging herself from the clinging hands of her captors, went to meet him and be introduced to the friends he had accidentally encountered during his researches in the marl-pit.

But Maude was too much shocked at being found by strangers in such a dishevelled condition to imitate her sister's example. Her only thought was how to avoid them.

Waving the children away too imperiously to allow of their following her any further, she ran down a slope and sprang across the wide ditch at the bottom, intending to stay in the meadow beyond till the coast was clear.

But as she sped quickly towards a clump of bushes that would make a convenient hiding-place, she heard a splash and a scream behind her.

Then, and not till then, she remembered Alfie.

He had obeyed her injunctions only too literally. It had been impressed upon him so often that wherever Maude went he was to go too, that as soon as he saw her leap the ditch he concluded that it was part of the fun, and unhesitatingly leaped too.

Before his shriek brought Nesta and her father to the spot, or Maude could give him any assistance, he had scrambled out; but in what a plight!

The water was stagnant, covered with weed, and smelling horribly, and in his terror the child—half-choked, half-blinded—threw his arms about Maude, whose delicate silk skirts suffered irreparable damage in consequence.

Mr. Coryton, who knew by experience that his little son was likely to suffer seriously from such an accident, hurried with him to the house, where, with Mrs. Smith's assistance, Alfie was quickly stripped and put into a warm bath. From thence, wrapped in a hot blanket, he was carried to the spare bed, his anxious father electing to remain

at the farm and watch beside him till the morning.

Mr. Coryton had spoken so sharply to his daughters—"Is this the way you look after your brother?"—that Nesta could scarcely restrain her tears and Maude was offended. But they had to put their own feelings aside, for their time was up; the children must be gathered together, their baskets of floral treasures packed, and little feet that now began to lag with fatigue urged to hasten along the field path to the station.

It would have been unkind to check their raptures with short answers and gloomy looks, so Nesta listened and smiled and sympathized till the train drew up at the terminus, and the last of the happy weary children was safely transferred to the care of a stalwart father, who bore her away on his shoulder.

Rain began to fall long before the sisters reached their own home, and Maude recollected for the first time that her lace parasol lay with her sketch-book on a grassy bank where no one was likely to descry either before the morning.

This fresh disaster coming on the top of the rest put her in such an ill-humour that Nesta's attempts at consolation drew down a storm upon her luckless head.

"Don't find fault with poor Nes," remonstrated Walter, who came to meet them with shawls and umbrellas, and was cruel enough to laugh at the queer figure Maude cut in an old gray cloak of Mrs. Smith's, much too small and too wide, but worn to conceal her ruined dress, while the lace and ostrich feathers of the elegant hat were

drooping under the heavy shower. "It is not fair to grumble at Nes. As far as I can hear she had nothing to do with your adventure."

"Not directly, perhaps; but if she and the rest of you had not done all in your power to spoil Alfie and make a little ruffian of him, I should not have taken him with me, and we should have been spared all this trouble and loss; the spoiling of his clothes and mine, and the destruction of my drawings."

"If you are going to argue in that roundabout style," said Cleve, who had accompanied his brother, "I shall begin too. If you had not been selfish and insisted on going—"

"Selfish!" Maude angrily repeated.

"Yes, selfish. You knew, and we all knew, that Nes wanted to take Mrs. Challoner with her. If you had not interfered and spoiled the scheme they would have had a happy day together, Alfie would have been safe at home with Margaret, and you would have saved your finery; but you never do consider Nes."

It was the rude speech of a school-boy, but there was truth enough in it to make it very unpalatable, and Maude hurried indoors, telling herself that she had always known Cleve to be the least likeable of all her brothers and sisters, and now she positively detested him.

CHAPTER XIV.

CLEVE'S SECRET.

ALFIE stayed at the farm for a week and then came home, looking none the worse for his ducking, and reconciled to the parting with all his other dumb friends by the gift of one of the kittens.

While he, with Margaret's help, was training Prim first to respect and then to be friendly with the little stranger, the days drew nearer to the periodical examinations both at the college Walter attended and the grammar-school.

Their general intelligence had helped to raise Mr. Coryton's sons into classes in which few if any of their class-mates were as young as themselves.

While giving all the credit of this to the instructions of their father and the companionship of Harold Challoner, both the lads were proud of their standing; but they also acknowledged that it compelled them to work very hard in order to keep up with their seniors in the regular routine of their studies.

Not that they ever regretted it. Walter might grumble and groan occasionally, run his fingers through his hair, and declare that it was no use trying to knock things into a head that was like a sieve and wouldn't keep anything in but the rubbish. After one of these fits of despondency he always buckled to more energetically than before

He had many advantages over his brother. Endowed with excellent health and a retentive memory, studying never fagged him, and he could not only learn quickly but retain what he had learned.

Perhaps of the two it was Cleve who was by nature the more studious. But he neither possessed Walter's sturdy constitution nor retentive powers. The elder boy could absorb himself in a problem or learn by heart a column of dates as he sat in the room where the rest of the family were busy at their various avocations, or he could lay down his book for half an hour and go back to it all the fresher for the change.

Cleve, on the contrary, found it impossible to fix his attention on a lesson while there was a buzz of voices around him. Maude refused to credit this, pointing to Walter as an example of what could be done if the will were not wanting; but so it was, and any attempt to prompt the boy or otherwise assist him only had the effect of increasing the irritation under which at such times he would labour.

Mr. Coryton watched him anxiously, and so did Nesta; but Maude was more inclined to be amused at their anxiety than to sympathize with it.

"It isn't possible that you think Cleve is doing too much, papa?"

"I did think so, my dear, till yesterday, when I called upon the master to whose class he belongs, and satisfied myself that his lessons are quite within the range of his capacity and he is not urged to go beyond it."

"I knew this; I felt sure of it!" and Maude nodded triumphantly at her sister. "It is Cleve's nature to be fussy and fidgety; but on more than one occasion he has shown that when he is in the humour he can learn as well and quickly as Walter does."

"Ay, but that spasmodic industry is not a healthy sign," Mr. Coryton replied. "I had rather see him plod steadily on than look as if he were taxing his brain more than is good for him."

"Dear papa, he eats well, sleeps well—"

"Not *well*, Maude," Nesta interposed. "Margaret, who has the room adjoining, often hears him muttering and tossing about."

"Without disturbing his bed-fellow? Rather unlikely, isn't it? But even if it be true, how can we alter it? Do you purpose taking him away from school, papa?"

Mr. Coryton meditated awhile before replying.

"I hope there will be no necessity for that. I shall see how he goes on. An idle life at home while others are striving for the honours he ought to carry off, might do him more harm than good."

"It is what he would prefer," said Maude; but here she did her brother injustice. Accidentally discovering that there had been some talk of withdrawing him for the rest of the term, Cleve so piteously entreated his father not to do so, that the idea was abandoned.

Not, however, without some reluctance on Mr. Coryton's part. He was very tender in his care of his Mary's children, especially those who inherited her nervous temperament. But he

reminded himself that in three weeks the long summer holidays would commence, and it might be possible to arrange for both the lads to spend part, if not the whole, of it at the Essex farm.

A good spell of country life and rustic fare would brace Cleve both mentally and bodily, and give Walter that insight into farming he was always longing to obtain.

So Cleve was allowed to go on as usual, no one but Maude objecting when he fell into a habit of carrying his books and papers upstairs to the room he shared with Walter, and there shutting himself in as long as the daylight lasted.

No one but Maude, whose keen observation was quickened by a little ill-will, happened to notice that when the boy came down winking and blinking as soon as the lamp was lighted, his exercises were still unwritten, his lessons still unlearned.

Margaret complained of having torn paper to sweep up, and presaged splashes of ink on her toilet-covers and curtains; but after Nesta protected these with newspapers she said no more, Maude standing alone in her protests that Cleve's freaks ought to be firmly resisted.

"Why," she would argue to her harassed sister—"why is all this latitude allowed to one, and that one the most unpleasantly selfish member of our household? How can you justify it? tell me that."

"I had rather not discuss it at all," Nesta pleaded. "If papa does not object why should we?"

"Because you, in your mistaken eagerness to oblige everyone, have impressed upon him that

Cleve cannot do his school work in any other way. Suppose Walter and Alfie, Una and Zoe, were to be seized with the same whim, would it be necessary to indulge them too, and how would you contrive it?"

"But it is only for a little while—another ten days," she was reminded, "and it does not interfere with any one's comfort. On the contrary, it is a relief not to see Cleve writhing on his chair, putting his hands over his ears to shut out the sound of our chattering, and either getting cross with the little ones or looking intensely miserable."

"You are not as forbearing with me when I complain of the noise the children make as soon as they get together," said Maude so reproachfully that a tear rolled down Nesta's cheek and fell on the pinafore she was making.

The sight of that pearly drop made her elder sister ashamed of having caused it to flow, and she was not content till she had expressed her regret. Maude was learning to prize the good opinion of the unpretending girl she had once been more disposed to contemn than admire, but none the less did she continue to nourish the ill feeling with which she regarded Cleve.

It was in tones of very unsisterly triumph that she came down stairs one day and announced a discovery.

"Were you aware that Cleve keeps one of his drawers locked?"

"I had not noticed it; but why should he not do so?"

"Why should he? you mean, and I believe I can tell you."

"Perhaps I had rather not hear it; at all events while Cleve is not at home to speak for himself."

Nesta said this so gravely that there was a short silence, during which Maude reddened, bit her lip, and seemed half inclined to retreat; but presently she cried:

"This is too absurd! You and I are answerable to papa for whatever is done in the house, and he expects us to keep a proper supervision over the younger ones."

"But not to act as spies, going into their rooms and seeking excuses to find fault with them."

"I have done no such thing," Maude protested. "I was following Alfie's kitten—you know how Margaret dislikes to find it upstairs—and—and I never thought you would speak to me in this way!"

"And I never thought you would give me cause," retorted Nesta, goaded by many small trials of temper that morning into defending herself as well as her absent brother. "If you and I are to live at peace with each other there must be no more of this harping on Cleve, and what he does or leaves undone."

"This is treating me like a child!" exclaimed the offended Maude. "By what right do you dictate to me? As head of this house in papa's absence I consider myself justified in knowing whatever takes place in it. For some time past I have suspected Cleve—"

Here she was interrupted by an indignant exclamation:

"Suspected your brother! Is it possible?"

Again Maude's colour came and went, but she persisted in telling her story:

"Yes, I do not deny it. I have felt confident that Cleve is deceiving papa, and you, and all of us. I have satisfied myself that it is not to get his lessons he shuts himself up every evening, but to avoid that thorough learning of them on which papa would insist.

"Ah! you shake that wise little head of yours and refuse to believe me; but then you have not seen, as I have, his confused look when Walter has put any questions to him, and how cross he has become if they are persevered in."

"Before you say any more," cried Nesta, "answer me this. Aren't you always more ready to find fault with Cleve than with the rest of us?"

"No, I will not answer what you have no right to ask. This time it is you who are unjust, not me. You will not even listen to a simple explanation of what happened this morning. The kitten ran into the boys' bed-room, and thinking both of them had started for school, I followed, that I might drive her down stairs. As soon as I pushed open the door I saw that Cleve was standing at one of the drawers, which he closed and locked immediately; then turned with a strange expression on his crimson face to see who was the intruder."

"You had startled him; that was all," said Nesta.

"I suppose I had, for he dashed past me without speaking, but—he carried the key of the drawer with him. *What does he keep locked up within it?*"

Nesta laughed outright at the melodramatic tone in which this was asked.

"Some school-boy secret not worth our knowing. Walter had a toy cannon once, and was so afraid papa would not consent to his keeping it, that he used to take it to bed with him, and was not found out till one night Cleve lay on it, and hearing Margaret moving begged her to bring a light and help him find out what made such a lump on his bed. Poor Walter's cannon was confiscated, and he slept on and knew nothing about it till the morning."

"But Walter is honest and truthful," retorted Maude. "If he had been questioned he would have answered frankly; whereas his brother would have glowered at you, muttered something, and either walked out of the room or taken refuge in a fit of the sulks."

It was impossible to deny this *in toto*, so Nesta contented herself with saying:

"Cleve is never sulky with me!"

"What, *never*? Test him now. If he will tell you what he hides, and why, I will not tease you to admit me into his confidence; but if you refuse to do this I shall feel justified in taking other measures."

Nesta might have laughed at such an indefinite threat had she not known that her sister was quite capable of acting upon it; and to avoid further unpleasantness she waylaid Cleve on the stairs that same evening.

But before she could speak the boy twisted himself out of reach of the arm laid caressingly across his shoulders

"I know what you are going to say and who set you at me. It was that meddling, domineering Maude. I wish she had never come home, that I do!"

"Why do you give her cause to complain of you?" Nesta gently demanded.

"Nonsense! it is no business of hers what I do. Next she will go chattering to papa; she is capable of it. Why cannot she let a fellow alone?"

And refusing to hear a word that could be urged in his sister's behalf, he ran into his room and slipped the bolt with a loud click, as if in defiance of these attempts to penetrate his secret.

CHAPTER XV.

MAUDE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

HAPPILY for the comfort of her relatives, an invitation to a garden party at Mr. Templeton's diverted Maude's thoughts. She had accepted it without first considering whether she had anything in her wardrobe suitable for an affair for which every one of their young friends—so said Violet Templeton—had ordered the sweetest of new dresses.

Although Maude had laughed a little scornfully when repeating this to Nesta, it had roused in her a determination not to put it in the power of the Misses Templeton to snub her for being shabby; and it was with a more serious face

than the occasion merited that she turned over the contents of her drawers and meditated upon them.

No; there was nothing there that could be worn in the full light of day, or in contact with the fresh crisp summer costumes the wives and daughters of city magnates might be expected to don.

There was no Dixon now to fold and press crumpled skirts or renovate fading ones. As for Maude's prettiest muslins they had been recklessly worn in the house and thrown aside instead of being kept in lavender for such occasions as this, while the delicate silk could never be freed from the green stains left by Alfie's embrace at the Essex farm.

Maud opened her purse. Its contents had dwindled down to a few shillings—enough for a new pair of gloves and some frilling, that was all.

Miss Ellerslie had generously continued to supply her with pocket-money, which, however, was spent with a lavish hand as soon as received. Maude always had so many small wants to supply—new music, a book she had heard praised, a picture she was inclined to copy, or the materials for some kind of needlework. The lesson of denying herself she had yet to learn.

To ask her father for a sufficient sum to purchase a new dress was the first thought that presented itself; but on maturer consideration she hesitated to do this—pride, shame, and some more laudable feeling combining to prevent it.

Mr. Coryton had accepted the invitation for

both his daughters, but Maude had taken it for granted that shy Nesta would prefer to stay at home. She was therefore as much surprised as displeased to learn one morning that her sister was looking forward to the garden party as a great treat.

"There will be a band of music—I do so love to hear a brass band in the open air! and the visitors will play at lawn-tennis—I enjoy watching that game; and it will be charming to see the people strolling or sitting about in that pretty garden."

"I thought you did not like the Templetons!" said Maude crossly.

"I cannot get on very well with my cousins; but their mother is always kind to me, and so is Mr. Templeton. I went there last summer and enjoyed myself immensely.

"But what will you wear?"

"My gray nun's veiling—what could be neater?—white gloves, and some nice flowers."

"I have no ambition to be neat, or to be likened to a Quakeress in dove-colour. I shall not go; in fact I cannot. I could not endure myself unless I were as well dressed as the rest."

"Nothing to wear! Oh, Maude! with that lovely embroidered muslin, and a cream one as well! *Neither of them fit to be seen!* But Margaret is unrivalled at getting up fine things; consult her."

Maude hesitated. This would involve laying herself under an obligation to the good woman whom she always treated with the scantiest courtesy. No, she could not resolve to take

Nesta's advice, but, as soon as she rose from the breakfast-table, went back to her room to make another inspection of a pale-blue lawn, and see whether plenty of new lace would not make that presentable.

She was just throwing the dress over her arm to carry it down stairs and hear Nesta's opinion when Walter shouted the name of his brother.

"Cleve, you old owl, are you poking up there again? Come down off your nest—do! Arthur Gateson wants to speak to you."

Cleve put his head out of the door of his room, crying peevishly:

"I'm busy. What does he want?"

"Busy; and the quarter bell will ring directly! I'm just off. What does he want!—come and see."

Away rushed Walter and down ran Cleve, forgetting, in his haste to inquire the errand of his school-fellow, that he had left the drawer over which he had been leaning, not only unfastened but partly open.

In less than five minutes he came back, flushed and breathless with his haste, to find Maude standing by the now locked drawer with the key in her hand.

"What do you want here?" he cried angrily. "Give me that key!"

Instead of complying she slipped it into her pocket.

"I shall do no such thing, but keep it till papa comes home, and leave your punishment to him. You are a bad boy, Cleve—deceitful to a degree that I should have thought impossible in one of

my brothers. I have seen what you hide in your drawer."

"You have! and you mean to get me into trouble for it!"

But Maude was already walking away. She did not choose to parley with him. She had told him what she intended doing, and was not to be moved either by angry words or entreaties.

But when she reached the door she looked back just in time to see the exasperated Cleve snatch up a dictionary that lay on the table and hurl it at her.

The heavy book struck the wall close to her head with such force that Maude shrieked and flew into her own room, from which she did not venture to emerge till she had heard the front door close after the angry boy.

Even then she paused to debate whether she should mention this fracas to Nesta, who was in the garden striving to reduce Alfie to obedience. The kitten was missing; and its little master, with many tears and wails, was protesting that he couldn't go to school till he knew whether Prim had turned wicked and eaten her up.

Fortunately for the peace of the household kitty was found by Una curled up in the work-basket; and Alfie having been led away by Jim the errand-boy, Nesta was at liberty to listen to all her elder sister had to say.

The blue lawn was spread out on the table and its capabilities discussed. The lace, purchased long since in Germany, was produced and measured and pinned on in various ways—for its owner was hard to please that morning—and

finally pleated on to the dress by Nesta's nimble fingers; but not a word of what had passed betwixt Cleve and Maude did the latter divulge.

Alfie had to be brought home at noon under an umbrella, for one of those cold west winds that visit us not infrequently in the height of summer had brought with it heavy rain.

Maude gave utterance to many a hope that it was not the precursor of bad weather. If it should last long enough to compel the Templetons to postpone their party, how provoking it would be!

Nesta, more engrossed with the affairs of the present, was asking herself whether the boys would risk a drenching by coming home to dinner, or content themselves, as they had done occasionally in the winter, with a glass of milk and some biscuits at the nearest confectioner's.

Walter had the longest distance to walk, but Cleve was the more susceptible to cold. She was therefore not at all sorry that neither of them appeared until tea-time, when the elder of the two came in so wet and muddy that he had to change his clothes immediately.

"I've some dry things at the fire for Cleve," said Margaret, coming down with Walter's dripping serge suit held at arm's-length. "He ought to have been in before this. What possesses the boys to lag longest whenever the weather's at its worst is more than a body can tell."

Presently Mr. Coryton was heard stamping his feet on the mat, and warning the little ones to keep their distance till he had taken off his overcoat.

"It was a good thought to have such a nice fire," he said approvingly, "for though the season is summer the weather is almost winterly. However, the sky is clearing, we shall have a glorious sunset. And I have something for you in my pocket, Maude—a roll of photographs from the German masters which you and Nesta will be delighted with."

"To keep, papa?" asked Maude as she held out her hands for the prize.

"No, no; I wish they were, for I never saw anything more exquisite. They belong to Harold Challoner, given to him by the father of one of those boys he saved from drowning. He will be here presently to reclaim his property and ask a little advice as to the mounting of it."

"They manage that beautifully abroad," Maude observed. "Aunt Persis made a charming collection—"

But here Margaret, who had brought in the urn, grew impatient and contrived to edge in a few words.

"Beg pardon, sir, but Cleve isn't home yet. Can he be kept in for something or other?"

"It is possible, if not probable," smiled her master, "so we will not do him the honour of waiting for him."

But when a couple of hours had passed away without bringing the absentee, Nesta, who was watching the gate and listening to every passing footstep, began to look anxious, and Maude felt sufficiently uneasy to inquire if this had often happened.

"Never!" her sister promptly replied. "Dr.

Edgeton disapproves of 'keeping in' as a punishment."

Mr. Coryton looked at the clock and knit his brows.

"If Cleve had no dinner beyond a few biscuits he must want a good meal badly, and will be fit for nothing to-morrow. Put on your cap, Walter, and go to the grammar-school; ask for your brother, and if he is not at liberty to come away take in the note I will write to Dr. Edgeton, and wait for an answer."

Walter did not like his office, grumbling internally that Cleve should be such a softie as to get into any mess just before the exam.; but he scampered away plashing through the puddles and whistling as he went, to return in about twenty minutes pale and scared.

Of the little party that was gathered around the lamp Maude had lit for the better examination of the photographs, Nesta was the only one who heard him come in; but when she spoke every one looked up, startled by the distress audible in her tones.

"Something has happened! oh, Walter, what is it?"

"I can't say; but don't frighten yourself. Cleve *must* be all right, only, only, he hasn't been to school to-day."

"Cleve played the truant, and in such weather!" Mr. Coryton ejaculated. "It sounds incredible. Who told you this?"

"I met Dr. Edgeton at the door, and he very kindly went back with me to the house of Mr. Martin, the master who teaches the fourth form,

and he said directly that he was quite sure Cleve had not been in his place either in the morning or afternoon classes. Mr. Martin had come to the conclusion that he was ill."

"But this is most extraordinary!" cried the now alarmed father. "What can have induced the boy to go off in this strange manner, and where can he be? Nesta, do you know anything about it? No, I can see that you do not. Margaret! Where's Margaret?"

But here Maude stepped forward, feeling decidedly uncomfortable, but nerving herself with assurances that she had simply done her duty.

"Papa, I am afraid I know why Cleve is afraid to see you. This morning I discovered why he has been in the habit of shutting himself in his room for so many hours and keeping one of his drawers carefully locked. Here is the key. You will find that he hides in it a book—one, I am afraid, of many—that he has been secretly devouring, when you and Nesta believed him to be striving with difficult lessons."

Her father took the key, saying, "This must be inquired into!" but he was too uneasy and perplexed at the protracted absence of the lad to attach as much importance to Maude's revelation as he would have done at any other time. Nearly twelve hours had elapsed since Cleve left the house; where had he passed so long an interval? Night was approaching, and yet he did not return. Where could he be?

"I cannot endure this suspense any longer!" cried Mr. Coryton at last. "Give me my coat and hat, Walter. The foolish boy may be prowling

ing about the streets ashamed or afraid to come home till after dark. If I cannot find him I shall try to learn whether he has taken refuge with either of his class-mates."

"Let me go too, papa," Walter entreated. "I can be of use to you if it is only in showing you where they live."

Accordingly the father and son set off together, Margaret standing at the gate, her apron over her head, till the gathering darkness hid them from her view; then she came into the room where Nesta and Maude were standing side by side on the hearthrug, the one shivering with nervous dread; the other biting her lips, and striving not only to appear unconcerned but to feel so.

"There can be no cause for alarm," she had declared more than once. "Boys are always saying or doing something outrageous; and when papa catches Master Cleve I hope he will punish him severely."

Margaret heard part of these remarks, and it was to Nesta she addressed herself.

"Bless thy dear tender heart, don't look so downcast! I'm going to put on my old cloak and bonnet, and trot up and down the streets to see whether I cannot light upon our boy. If he knows himself in the wrong he may be afraid to let his father find him; but he'll not run away from his old nursie. You'll not mind being left? The little ones are all abed and asleep."

"Mind, oh, no!" was the eager response. "Go, pray go, and bring him back to us if you can."

Away sped Margaret, and another half-hour

elapsed without bringing home either the seekers or the sought. Nesta, now more outwardly calm than her sister, sat knitting, her lips moving occasionally as she murmured a fervent prayer for Cleve's safety.

As for Maude, she paced restlessly about the room, rushed to the door every time she thought she heard anyone approaching it, and finally ran upstairs, to return in hat and ulster.

"Yes, I'm going to look for Cleve as well as the rest, because I think I know where he is to be found. Do you recollect the name of the lad who came here to speak to him this morning?"

"Arthur Gateson; but he is not in the same form as Cleve; he is in a more advanced one."

"No matter; some appointment must have been made, which Cleve left this house to keep."

"I cannot think so," Nesta thoughtfully replied. "Our boys have never been intimate with Arthur Gateson; he has some very fine rabbits which he invited them to call and see; but they did not go, though I forget why."

"Cleve is with this young Gateson, I feel sure of it," exclaimed Maude confidently; "where does he live?"

"His father is a large tea-dealer in the city; there is one of his advertisements in the daily paper; but I think you must be mistaken. Even if you are not, it is too late for you to go anywhere by yourself."

"I am not a child," Maude retorted; "and how can either of us rest till the tiresome boy is found? Don't tease me with objections, for I cannot spare time to stay and listen to them."

But still Nesta followed and detained her.

"Wait! only wait till papa comes in," she entreated; "then, if he has had no success, he or Walter will go with you. I cannot bear the idea of your going alone!"

But Nesta might as well have talked to the winds. Twitching her sleeve away, Maude quitted the house and ran down the garden, returning, however, to kiss her sister on both cheeks and bid her be hopeful.

"I know you, you foolish child, and how you are conjuring up all sorts of horrors; but content yourself. Cleve will turn up presently, and you will be the first to laugh at me for taking part in the search for the troublesome young rascal."

She was gone before any reply could be made, and Nesta, now left alone in the house, save and except the sleeping children, drew aside one of the curtains of the bay-window in the dining-room, and there awaited as patiently as she could the return of her father or Margaret.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE CITY.

WITH Mr. Gateson's address in her glove and a station of the Metropolitan Railway within walking distance, Maude saw no reason why she should not set forth on her enterprise. A young lady who had travelled both here and

abroad, and taken charge of an invalid, need not be deterred by the lateness of the hour, or the remonstrances of a timid sister.

What really urged her into action was that she felt much more uncomfortable respecting Cleve than she cared to acknowledge. Perhaps conscience would not be silenced in spite of repeated efforts to convince herself that she had done nothing but her duty. Ever since Walter came home with the news that his brother was missing, remorse and self-reproach had been tormenting her, and refused to be hushed by vague protests that she had only done what she knew to be right.

How could she conceal from her own heart that she had lain in wait for the boy till she succeeded in surprising his secret, and then held over him the terrors of his father's wrath till she had, though without intending it, frightened him into flight!

It was easy to say that Cleve's guilty sense of deserving punishment may have had more to do with it than her threats; equally easy to call him a bad, deceitful lad, who merited whatever befell him; but at such moments as Maude was now passing through it is impossible to forget that we may be making the innocent suffer as keenly as the actual culprit.

The troubled looks of Nesta haunted her as she walked briskly along, and a few words spoken by Margaret came back to her memory again and again. "The boy has never been strong," his nurse had said, speaking to herself more than his sisters, "never strong; and if he has been out

in all this rain I'm sadly feared it will lay him on a sick-bed."

Of course this was an exaggeration, and Margaret had no business to utter such an unpleasant prediction, but Maude could not forget it. It was indeed a miserable night. She had felt chilled by the damp even in the shelter of the house, and worn a shawl, because the wind seemed to force its way through every crack and crevice, yet the delicate Cleve had been exposed to it for hours. Cleve might even then be wandering about these muddy streets, because he dare not brave the punishment he would owe to her.

"I might have spoken more gently," she sighed, "or I might have chosen a better time for what I had to say. Nesta would have been equally horrified to find that he was wasting his time and perverting his mind with trashy stories of robbers and bandits, but she would have made him see the folly of it without driving him to such extremities. I wish I possessed a little of her tact."

And then Maude quickened her steps almost to a run, for a couple of rough men, who were swaggering along the pavement arm in arm, hailed her rudely, and she remembered with dismay that there was neither father nor brother at hand to protect her.

She could not shake off the effects of this unpleasant rencontre.

Her heart was beating painfully all the while she waited on the railway platform for a train to carry her cityward, and she furtively watched her fellow passengers through her veil, tremb-

ling and starting every time either of them happened to glance towards the corner in which she had ensconced herself.

Under these circumstances she soon began to wish she had listened to Nesta's counsels, and stayed where she was till her father or Margaret could accompany her. But pride would not let her own herself in the wrong by going back. She had acted with her usual impetuosity, and intended to put up with the consequences, taking what comfort she could in the hope—and a very faint one it was—that she should find Cleve at Mr. Gateson's, and have him for her companion on the return journey.

And now she had reached the city, and with swift steps was threading its narrow streets of lofty warehouses. A few hours earlier they had been crowded with wagons and pedestrians; every one intent on the buying and selling that drew them thither. But after nightfall those busy streets are so dark and deserted that Maude could have fancied she had found her way into a city of the dead.

A policeman came to her assistance when she had some difficulty in finding the turning that led to Mr. Gateson's premises, and, cheered by the knowledge that this guardian of the peace was not far away, she plunged down a badly-lit entry, and presently succeeded in finding a bell; knocker there was none.

She pulled the wire so vigorously that the clang clang resounded and echoed from end to end of the building, but the summons had to be repeated before she saw the gleam of a lamp

through the fanlight above her, and heard some one shuffling in slippers across the hall.

Was this shabby female, in a dingy woollen crossover and rusty bonnet, one of Mr. Gateson's servants? She was slightly deaf, and answered Maude's civil inquiries with her hand to her ear and an aggrieved air.

"What may you be wanting with Mr. Gateson at this time o' night?" she queried crossly. "If I ain't sick and tired of being fetched to this ere door, first by them ruffins of boys that call it a *lark*, and then to answer foolish questions!"

"I wish to speak to your master," she was haughtily informed.

"Then you might ha' knowed, young woman, that he ain't to be found here after five o'clock. He leaves then punctooal, and goes home to his house in the country; and so you're answered, and good-night to you."

For such a disappointment as this Maude was not prepared. Utterly inexperienced in city life she had not been aware that few, very few, of our wealthier traders reside nowadays in London proper. Seeing that the woman was about to close the door, she stepped nearer and prevented it.

"I am sorry to have given you trouble, but I did not know what you have just told me. Before you go away, pray give me Mr. Gateson's private address. He must be the gentleman I want to find, that is if he has a son attending — College."

The caretaker shook her head.

"That's not the name of the place; it's Saint something at Cambridge. But perhaps you don't

mean Mr. John, but Master Arthur. I believe he do get his schooling at some such a place as you mentions. Boards there, don't he? with one of the masters, and only goes home once a week and holidays. That's been the plan ever since the old gentleman moved into the new villa he have built hisself at Sydenham."

Arthur Gateson boarding within the precincts of the college, and his parents residing some miles away, and on the other side of the metropolis! Maude could have wrung her hands in her vexation as she heard it.

Then this tiresome journey had been altogether fruitless, and when the woman, not choosing to be detained longer, shut the door in her face, it needed all her courage to keep her from sitting down on the step and having a good cry.

She could no longer flatter herself that her missing brother was with his schoolfellow, no longer rehearse the arguments and reproaches with which Cleve was to have been overwhelmed until, penitent and ashamed, he consented to accompany her home. She would have to go back to Granby Villa alone, weary, and more heavy-hearted than when she broke from Nesta, and refused to be detained.

And now she grew more nervous, more apprehensive. The lateness of the hour and the distance to be traversed before she could reach the haven of home oppressed her almost beyond endurance.

Ere long a new fear awoke to aggravate her perplexities. The turnings and windings of these narrow city streets were most confusing. What

if she should lose herself amongst them? In her agitation she could not remember whether she ought to bear to the right or the left, and no friendly policeman to whom she could apply was visible.

Afraid to proceed till she knew which route to follow, yet conscious that she had not a moment to lose if she would secure the last train, she was gazing helplessly around her when a man came in sight.

He was walking rapidly along the opposite pavement, and she was trying to summon courage to go to him for direction, when, to her consternation, he stopped short, surveyed the shrinking figure under the lamp, and crossed the street towards her.

Terrified out of all her boasted presence of mind Maude did not wait for him to approach, but fled wildly, recklessly, driven she knew not whither by the horrible thought that she was being followed by an insolent stranger, and even imagining she could hear him calling to her to stop.

Not daring to look behind lest this fear should be realized, she dashed across a wider thoroughfare, deaf to the warning shout of a cabman, who had not time to pull up before his horse was actually upon her. Maude had scarcely become aware of her peril when a rude shock deprived her of her senses.

Once, and once only, she was vaguely conscious that a number of persons had gathered around her, while high above their throng of curious faces she could see the star-lit sky and feel the

night air blowing down upon her; but before she could rouse herself sufficiently to wonder what had happened, or where she was, the by-standers hustled each other aside to make way for a couple of men with a stretcher.

Then, ah! then, the torture of being moved! Tenderly and carefully though it was done, the inevitable suffering ended in one of those stupors that are often felt as a mercy to those who look on, as well as those whose agonies we can do so little to relieve.

When Maude did open her eyes again, with the light of reason shining in them, she was in bed, but not in her own room. Her first glances fell upon long uncurtained windows and white-washed walls, and she lay gazing at them perplexedly.

She had been dreaming of being abroad with Miss Ellerslie, and climbing with aching limbs and intolerable weariness the precipitous sides of hills that seemed to grow higher and steeper as she climbed on.

Could this have been no dream after all, and was she spending the night in the half-furnished inn of some village perched in a cleft of the mountains? It might be so, she mused; but in that case where was Aunt Persis?

Turning her head a little—how heavy it was and how painful—the subdued light in the room enabled her to descry another bed at no great distance from her own. Was it Miss Ellerslie who lay there tossing so restlessly from side to side and moaning feebly?

Maude essayed to speak to this poor creature,

but her lips and throat were so dry that she could not raise her voice above a whisper.

Still under the influence of her dream she attributed to excessive fatigue the strange pains that shot through her temples whenever she attempted to raise her head, and the curious lassitude that made her reluctant to rise and go to the assistance of the moaning sufferer.

Presently a door opened so far away from where she was lying as to make her aware that this room was no cribbed, confined chamber in a mere cottage. The tall figure of a woman in the apron and cap of a nursing sister came quickly but noiselessly to the side of the other bed, and the moaning ceased.

Maude saw this nurse raise her patient and support her while she drank the contents of the cup held to her lips. No, this was not Miss Ellerslie, but a mere girl tortured with racking pains.

Not till something had been done for her relief—her pillows arranged so as to place her in an easier position, and a few words of consolation and hope murmured in her ear—did the nurse leave her, and then it was to lean over Maude, deftly arrange some bandage passed across her forehead, and whisper to herself with a sigh "This poor, poor child!"

"I am not asleep," she was told. "You are English, don't go away till you have told me where I am. Was the diligence overturned, and who was hurt, and when did it happen? My memory fails me so oddly. Do ask Aunt Persis to come and help me collect my thoughts."

But even as Maude was talking the events of her journey to the city began to make themselves remembered, and clutching the cool soft hand laid so softly on her forehead she gasped another question.

"That man—that dreadful man—did he overtake me?"

"My child, you were running away from a friend, not an enemy," was the compassionate reply. "Harold Challoner, my son, going to your father's house some short time after you left it, found Nesta so uneasy on your account that he offered to follow and escort you home. Terror must have made you deaf as well as blind, for he tells me he shouted to you repeatedly, begging you to stop."

"Then you are Mrs. Challoner?" and Maude eyed the gentle speaker curiously. "I suppose I must have fainted, for I do not recollect anything that happened after I began to run. And it was your son who brought me to you? I am much obliged; but I should like to go home; papa and Nesta will be so dreadfully uneasy about me."

"They know you are here; they will come and see you by and by."

"I had rather—much rather—go to them. Will you send for a fly? and leave me a little while that I may get up and dress."

Mrs. Challoner laid her hand upon Maude's, but did not speak; and a vague dread of what she had yet to hear made the girl's pulses quicken.

"Cleve!" her white lips formed the word, but could not utter it.

"Be comforted; he has been found, and Margaret will take good care of him."

"Then he is ill?"

"Yes, but progressing favourably."

"I must go home," said Maude again. "Is it very late? How long have I been here with you?"

"Since Thursday night."

"And this is—"

"Monday," Mrs. Challoner told her.

Maude cried out in amazement:

"Why, that is three—four days—or rather nights—it is all as one night to me. Oh, it is impossible! Have I been ill too? delirious?"

"You were knocked down by a horse, and one of the wheels of a cab went over you."

And having said this Mrs. Challoner crossed to the other side of the room, where another row of beds, each tenanted, was rendered visible by the light of the lamp she carried.

By a desperate effort Maude raised herself on one elbow sufficiently to follow the movements of the nurse, and discover that one of her own legs was swathed and bound and inserted in a kind of cradle.

She dropped back aghast with horror, and was immediately reminded by an increase of the pain in her head that there was something amiss there also.

"Why was I not taken home to die?" she sobbed when Mrs. Challoner returned to her.

"Because you were brought here to be cured. My Harold has immense confidence in his mother, and his thoughts flew to her as soon as he saw

that you were badly hurt. Only be patient and hopeful and you will soon be able to leave us."

"What is this place?" asked Maude; "not a hospital, surely! Don't tell me that I am in a hospital."

"You are at St. Bertha's. Have you never heard of St. Bertha's? Ah, my child, thank our Father in heaven that there are such asylums for those who suffer, and pray that your sojourn within its walls may be blest to you, as it has been to many."

And then Mrs. Challoner, mindful of other duties, went on her way through the wards to minister to others, while Maude, too weak to do aught else, sobbed herself to sleep. It was the first healthful repose she had enjoyed since Harold in great distress hurried to St. Bertha's and sent for his mother that he might confide the injured girl to her care while he went to break the news of the accident to her relatives.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT ST. BERTHA'S.

A BROKEN leg was not the worst of the injuries Maude was suffering from. In the fall that threw her under the wheel of the cab a chance kick from the frightened restive horse had caused concussion of the brain. For several

hours her life was in danger, and there was an ugly wound which would be some time healing.

Nor, though the worst symptoms were gradually yielding to the skill of the surgeons at St. Bertha's, was she considered equal to the excitement a visit from her relatives would inevitably produce. Mr. Coryton had hurried thither each morning, eager to hear how she was progressing, and as long as she was insensible he had been allowed to stand by her bed and satisfy himself, that, however alarming her state might be, it was not a hopeless one. Now he patiently acquiesced in the mandate that bade him content himself with hearing from Mrs. Challoner that she was conscious and making some improvement.

Maude herself protested angrily against this prohibition, and would not believe that there was any necessity for it. She spent the greater part of the day in a dreamy condition, the result of extreme weakness; but when night came and she awoke out of a doze, to find Mrs. Challoner looking down upon her, she saluted her with a murmur of complaint.

"What a long time you have been away! I thought you must have forgotten me!"

"I left you in good hands. Nurse Bessie is famous for the way she manages her patients."

"I do not choose to be managed, especially by a rough, coarse, ignorant woman!" was the querulous response.

"Hush!" and Mrs. Challoner spoke gravely and sternly. "You must not speak in such terms as those of a person to whom we, you—every one who comes under her care—owes so much."

"Papa will pay—"

But again the fretful murmur was checked.

"You called Nurse Bessie low and coarse. She is a baronet's daughter, and a very refined as well as accomplished woman. Ignorant, too, you said. You were not aware that to her clever articles in some of our medical journals many improvements in our hospitals are owing."

Maude looked ashamed of her petulance, and proffered a half-hearted sort of apology.

"Perhaps I was wrong; but if you had heard how she spoke to me when I objected to be touched by strangers and bade them fetch you—"

Mrs. Challoner smiled.

"Yes, Nurse Bessie can be peremptory and insist on being obeyed, but it is only when she sees a necessity for it. Wait a while, and you will acknowledge that she is the right woman in the right place. Or ask your fellow-patients"—Maude winced at the expression—"ask them who they would prefer to have with them during an operation, and they will answer that there is no one here so firm and helpful, yet tender and comforting, as Nurse Bessie."

"But you—I would rather have you. I know you—a little—and this place does not seem quite so frightful when you are near me. Why have you been so long away?"

"Partly because there are others who need me more than you do, partly because the rules of St. Bertha require that all within its walls shall pay due regard to the laws of health. I am only here to relieve the regular night nurse, who has gone to the sea-side to recruit herself; but I obey the

same regulations; I come on duty at 10 P.M. and do not leave the wards till 6 the next morning. I find plenty of occupation in administering medicine, watching over those who sleep, and doing whatever is needful for those who wake. My days are spent in resting and taking regular outdoor exercise. If I did not do this my strength would be severely tried whenever there are bad cases to be attended to."

Maude shuddered.

"What a life! what an occupation! How can you, educated and sensitive as you evidently are—how can you endure it?"

Mrs. Challoner smiled a little sadly.

"Perhaps your question will answer itself before you leave us. But don't try to think just yet; be content to lie still and rest your brain as much as you can."

Maude took no notice of the latter part of Mrs. Challoner's speech, but demanded anxiously:

"When shall I be allowed to go home? Forgive me for saying so, but it was—yes, it was very cruel to bring me to a hospital!"

"Foolish child! is this your gratitude to the clever doctors but for whose skill so promptly employed in your behalf you might have spent the rest of your days a cripple? Do you quite ignore the trouble, the anxiety, and expense it would have entailed on your father and Nesta if it had been possible to convey you home. Be thankful that the doors of St. Bertha were open to receive you."

When Mrs. Challoner came near Maude again, which was not till the night was half over,

her wakeful patient renewed the conversation directly.

"I think I could resign myself to staying here till I am not quite so helpless if I might see papa and Nesta. It is so hard to be thrown amongst strangers, and not see one familiar face in all the long sad hours of the day."

Mrs. Challoner's compassionate exclamation proved that she was well able to enter into this phase of Maude's troubles.

"Cheer up!" she said kindly; "and remember that all the restrictions imposed upon you are for your good. And now you shall have a pleasant thought to dwell upon. If I can give Dr. Harting a favourable report of your condition you may be allowed to receive a visitor at the appointed hour."

"And if not," answered Maude despondently, "how shall I endure the disappointment?"

"By thinking more of your neighbours and less of yourself. The poor girl on your right does not know anyone in London. Her father and mother are far away in Cumberland; and the couple who hired her during a tour and brought her to town, because she was strong and willing, sent her here when she fell from a window she was cleaning, and have taken no further trouble about her. You are not as friendless as she is."

"She disturbs me with her moaning," said Maude, lowering her voice.

"The next time she does so repeat some comforting text or hymn to her. Perhaps even the knowledge that someone is feeling sorry for her

may give her more courage to bear the pains she suffers."

So saying Mrs. Challoner would have moved away, but Maude put out a hand and clutched her skirt.

"One word more before you go. Is—is the poor creature on the other side of me dying? The only time I ventured to turn my head in her direction she looked at me with such a ghastly face and such sunken eyes, that I longed to be able to get up and run away from such a dismal sight."

"Dying! oh, no! we are quite hopeful about Mrs. Sims. Overwork has reduced her to the state that shocks you. Had she not been weak and ill when a slip on the pavement injured her ankle she would not have been here long. You would do well to utilize the hours you find so tedious in praying for her, that she may yet be restored to her five little children and anxious husband."

"When one is very weak and ill one can only think of one's self," said Maude peevishly.

"Indeed! Have you ever tried?"

Mrs. Challoner said no more, but as she took a parting glance at her patients she saw that Maude was lying with her head turned towards Mrs. Sims' bed listening to the feeble accents of the overtaxed wife and mother, and drew a favourable augury from the circumstance.

Maude suffered considerably under the hands of the surgeon that morning, but the result of his examination was gratifying. The mischief to the spine was not as grave as he had feared it

would be, and in other respects she was going on favourably.

It was pleasant to hear this, and equally delightful to wake from an after-dinner nap and find Nesta kneeling beside her. That dear, dear sister! what joy to feel her warm kisses once more, and to draw the face Maude now thought perfectly lovely down and down till it rested on the same pillow!

"How I have yearned to see you, my precious Nes! Is papa here too?"

"He will come to you to-morrow if you bear this interview well."

"I will, I will! I am learning to do as I am bid. It is one of the first lessons they teach you here," said Maude ruefully. "But I do not want to talk of myself or to be pitied. Tell me about Cleve. Oh, Nesta, I was very much to blame! I ought to have been more forbearing with him."

"He is at home, and rather better to-day."

"Then he has been ill! You only nod, but your looks mean 'very.' Where was he found? Don't hide anything from me."

"Crouched in a doorway, fainting with fatigue and exhaustion, at a town some twenty miles from London."

"Was it fear of papa that caused his flight?"

Nesta hesitated a little before replying, but Maude insisting on the fullest details, and a feverish spot beginning to burn on her cheek, her sister decided that to be quite frank would be less dangerous than keeping her in suspense.

"First of all I must tell you that Cleve was not hiding anything in his drawer that could

have made papa angry. The book you thought you saw was only an old cover given by a school-fellow and used for keeping his papers together."

"What papers?"

"Ah! there lay his secret. Our brother's favourite companion at school was one of half a dozen elected to be raised to a higher form. Cleve was not chosen, because he was not considered equal to the work of it, and in his anxiety to prove that he was, he had procured a copy of the papers and problems to be sent in at the exam. and worked them out in his own time. Admirably well done they are, Dr. Edgeton says."

"But why did he run away? Papa might have disapproved of his doing so much, yet if his health had not suffered by it—"

"Oh, Maude dear, don't you see what drove the poor boy from home? He confesses that in his rage at finding you had been at his drawer he flung a heavy book at your head. You screamed, and, fancying you were hurt, he rushed away, feeling like a second Cain, and telling himself that there was nothing left for him to do but go to one of the seaports and get a berth as a cabin-boy."

"Who found him?"

"The police. Papa gave notice at the nearest station, and a description of the missing lad was telegraphed from place to place till it resulted in the glad tidings being brought to us that he was safe."

Nesta did not dilate on the anguish of that night when the loss of Cleve was rendered more terrible by the news of the accident to his sister;

neither did she speak of sundry long watches, shared with Margaret and her father, beside the lad who raved incessantly of Maude, sometimes reproaching her for her unkindness, sometimes accusing himself of having killed her; but Maude learned these things by and by from Mrs. Chalonier, and pondered and wept over them many a time and oft while she lay at St. Bertha's.

And several weeks did elapse before she was able to leave the hospital. Yet after all they were not unhappy ones.

Nesta came every visiting-day, sometimes bringing Una or Zoe with her, and it was pleasant to see how many faces besides Maude's brightened as soon as she appeared.

Somehow she made acquaintance with every one who lay in the ward. Without giving Maude reason to feel herself neglected, Nesta contrived to do many a kind office for its other occupants. It was at her suggestion that Maude divided with them the lovely flowers sent by Mrs. Templeton; but it was Nesta who brought interesting books or periodicals for those who were fond of reading, and new patterns for those who were able to wile away some of the tedious hours with crochet and knitting.

Nesta also wrote letters to the aged parents of the girl whose home was in the north, and went promptly to the assistance of Mrs. Sims when she saw her trying, with shaking fingers, to fashion a frock for the baby left in the care of a compassionate neighbour.

On this occasion, as soon as the bell rang for visitors to depart, Maude held out her hand for

the pieces of print her sister had been pinning and contriving and tacking.

"Leave those with me," she said. "Let me try if I cannot imitate you and help my neighbours instead of bemoaning myself. No; don't praise me; perhaps it is the occupation I crave more than anything else."

When Mr. Coryton came again, which was not till the following Sunday, Maude faltered a confession.

"Papa, I have made a great many mistakes, and wrought a great deal of unhappiness. How shall I atone for it all?"

"My dear, I do not understand you."

"In the first place, I did not act rightly in leaving Aunt Persis so hastily. While I have lain here I have thought of her very often, and wished I had been more considerate and grateful."

Mr. Coryton's face saddened, and his daughter detected it.

"Why do you look at me so strangely? Is she worse? Oh, if I could but go to her and ask her to forgive my unkindness! I thought it was my duty to go home; but I forgot that I owed a duty to her too."

"Hush, Maude, you must not excite yourself!" said her father tenderly. "Be thankful to know that Miss Ellerslie's last words were an affectionate remembrance to you."

"Then she is dead?"

"Ah! child, her sufferings were so great that those who witnessed them rejoiced when they were over."

When Maude had wiped away the tears that flowed freely she would have asked more particulars; but Mr. Coryton had risen to leave her.

"Dixon is in London, and will come and tell you all you wish to hear as soon as you are equal to it. Miss Ellerslie bequeathed her property to you, my daughter."

"Heaping coals of fire on my head!" she sighed. "And yet I meant to do right, papa! I am afraid all my failures have arisen from a lack of humility. I have been so vain and self-willed, and had such absurd confidence in myself! If I could but be as gentle as Nesta, or as sensible as Mrs. Challoner!"

Her father kissed her quivering lips affectionately.

"Walk in the ways of your dear dead mother; remember how Christ-like she was, and all will yet be well with you, my darling. I pray for you nightly that these hours of sickness and suffering may be to you, as they have been to many, blessings in disguise."

Long before Maude left St. Bertha's she was able to spend many pleasant hours in the convalescents' room, and, what she liked better still, with Mrs. Challoner.

Then it was that she learned to love and respect that excellent woman as well as the son whose affection for his mother was very pleasant to see. Then it was that many of Maude's worst prejudices were overcome and her better feelings awakened.

She left St. Bertha's with actual regret, pro-

missing herself frequent visits there, and went home to be so affectionately welcomed that she cried for joy.

When Walter and Cleve—who was now quite recovered—saw her wan and changed, unable to move without crutches, they forgot all old quarrels and vied with each other in waiting on her; nor did the little ones shrink from her caresses, or fear her rebukes, when they saw her dependent on Nesta and Margaret, and heard her gratefully acknowledge it.

Miss Ellerslie's bequest, though it was not received without much remorse and many tears, has enabled Mr. Coryton's eldest daughter to relieve him of some expenses and anxieties pressing heavily just then. In unselfish acts she is learning that consideration for others and humility of spirit hitherto lacking, and in her own family it is no longer a task to be rebelled at but a pleasure to be fulfilled, when aught is done by the wish of Queen Maude.

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